

Sūrah Muzzammil

Central Theme and Relationship with the Previous *Sūrah*

This *sūrah* and the one following it – *Sūrah Muddaththir* – are very similar to one another. The same mood pervades them and together they form a pair. Most exegetes regard them to be very early Makkan *sūrahs*. However, a deliberation on their contents reveals that they were revealed at the time when the opposition of the affluent among the Quraysh to the call of Islam had reached such an extent that the Prophet (sws) would continuously remain worried and thoughtful on this situation.

It is hard to imagine the sorrow and distress of a person who has become a target of allegations and sarcasm from everyone in his surroundings even though he had been deputed by the Almighty to reform these very surroundings. In these circumstances, it is but natural for him to prefer seclusion and isolation from others. When he stands up, he covers himself with his shawl; when he walks, he wraps himself in it; when he sits, he seeks its refuge and when he lies down, he hides himself in it. The reason for this is that it is only his shawl which affords him the opportunity to immerse himself deep into his soul and it is through his shawl that he gets comfort and satisfaction in seeking the nearness of God.

Every person who is vigilant in his responsibilities towards His Creator and fellow brethren has some experience of what is stated above. However, the matter of the prophets of God is totally different. They are very affectionate and caring towards their fellow human beings and are very sensitive regarding the responsibilities imposed on them by their Creator. When, in spite of their tremendous struggle and efforts for reformation, they see that the animosity of people is only increasing, they think that perhaps they themselves are at fault. This augments their worries. The effect of this is that instead of assuring themselves by blaming others they isolate and seclude themselves in order to find a solution to this state of affairs. In this mental state, they feel that their shawl is their greatest sympathizer hiding in which they can detach themselves from their surroundings.

A person enshrouded in his shawl is called مُرْمَلٌ. By addressing the Prophet (sws) in this manner, the Almighty has portrayed this thoughtful nature of the Prophet (sws). It is a very affectionate address. By

addressing him in such an affectionate manner, he is guided to the way which will relieve him of this sorrow and sadness, and instil in him the strength and determination essential to counter the circumstances he is facing and will be facing in future. In other words, through this *sūrah*, the Prophet (sws) is also encouraged and inspired so that he is able to defy the adverse circumstances he is facing. He is simultaneously informed of a very effective method which will lift his spirits and provide him with determination.

Analysis of the Discourse

Section I (Verses 1-14): The Prophet (sws) is directed to regularly offer the *tahajjud* prayer by night and to recite the Qur'ān in it in slow measured tones. This shall soothe and strengthen his mind and soul and enable him to bear the heavy burden of his responsibilities that shall be entrusted to him during the course of his mission of prophethood. In the day time also, there is an opportunity for him to glorify the praises of his Lord; so he should keep in remembrance the name of his Lord and seek refuge in His mercy; He is the Lord of the East and the West and so the Prophet (sws) should entrust all his matters to Him. With patience should he ignore the nonsensical acts of his enemies and leave their matter to God, Who is enough to take them to account.

Section II (Verses 15-19): The Quraysh are warned that just as the Almighty had sent the Prophet Moses (sws) to the Pharaoh to bear witness to the truth before him, He has also sent towards them a Prophet. They should keep in mind the fate of the Pharaoh and his nation and that if they also adopt the attitude the Pharaoh had adopted, their fate will be no different. They should remember the Day whose horror will make children grey-haired – the Day with whose burden the sky will cleave asunder. The Qur'ān is an admonition which is meant to remind people of this great event. Therefore, he who wants his own well-being should remain on the right path; otherwise he should get ready to face dire consequences.

Section III (Verse 20): The last verse of this *sūrah* was revealed in Madīnah. In it, the directives of the *tahajjud* prayer mentioned at the beginning of the *sūrah* have been modified – being reduced in their extent. However, with this reduction, certain other alternatives have been suggested to compensate for it which will be helpful in protecting the real purpose and are in accordance with the new circumstances which have arisen.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

يَا أَيُّهَا الْمَرْمُلُ (١) قُمْ اللَّيْلَ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا (٢) نِصْفَهُ أَوْ انْقُصْ مِنْهُ قَلِيلًا (٣) أَوْ زِدْ عَلَيْهِ
وَرَتِّلِ الْقُرْآنَ تَرْتِيلًا (٤) إِنَّا سَنُلْقِي عَلَيْكَ قَوْلًا ثَقِيلًا (٥) إِنَّ نَاشِئَةَ اللَّيْلِ هِيَ أَشَدُّ وَطْئًا
وَأَقْوَمُ قِيلًا (٦) إِنَّ لَكَ فِي النَّهَارِ سَبْحًا طَوِيلًا (٧) وَاذْكُرْ اسْمَ رَبِّكَ وَتَبَتَّلْ إِلَيْهِ تَبْتِيلًا (٨)
رَبُّ الْمَشْرِقِ وَالْمَغْرِبِ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ فَاتَّخِذْهُ وَكِيلًا (٩) وَاصْبِرْ عَلَى مَا يَقُولُونَ وَاهْجُرْهُمْ
هَجْرًا جَمِيلًا (١٠) وَذُرْنِي وَالْمُكَذِّبِينَ أُولِيَ النَّعْمَةِ وَمَهِّلْهُمْ قَلِيلًا (١١) إِنَّ لَدَيْنَا أَنْكَالًا
وَجَحِيمًا (١٢) وَطَعَامًا ذَا غُصَّةٍ وَعَذَابًا أَلِيمًا (١٣) يَوْمَ تَرْجُفُ الْأَرْضُ وَالْجِبَالُ وَكَانَتْ
الْجِبَالُ كَثِيبًا مَهِيلًا (١٤) إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَا إِلَيْكُمْ رَسُولًا شَاهِدًا عَلَيْكُمْ كَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا إِلَى فِرْعَوْنَ
رَسُولًا (١٥) فَعَصَى فِرْعَوْنَ الرَّسُولَ فَأَخَذْنَاهُ أَخَذًا وَبِيلًا (١٦) فَكَيْفَ تَتَّقُونَ إِنْ كَفَرْتُمْ
يَوْمًا يَجْعَلُ الْوِلْدَانَ شِيبًا (١٧) السَّمَاءُ مُنْفَطِرٌ بِهِ كَانَ وَعْدُهُ مَفْعُولًا (١٨) إِنَّ هَذِهِ تَذْكِرَةٌ
فَمَنْ شَاءَ اتَّخَذْ إِلَى رَبِّهِ سَبِيلًا (١٩) إِنَّ رَبَّكَ يَعْلَمُ أَنَّكَ تَقُومُ أَدْنَى مِنْ ثُلُثِي اللَّيْلِ وَنِصْفَهُ
وثلثه وطائفة من الذين معك والله يُقَدِّرُ اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ عَلِمَ أَنْ لَنْ تُحْصَوْهُ فَتَابَ عَلَيْكُمْ
فَأَقْرَأُوا مَا تيسَّرَ مِنَ الْقُرْآنِ عَلِمَ أَنْ سَيَكُونُ مِنْكُمْ مَرْضَى وَآخَرُونَ يَضْرِبُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ
يَبْتَغُونَ مِنْ فَضْلِ اللَّهِ وَآخَرُونَ يُقَاتِلُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ فَأَقْرَأُوا مَا تيسَّرَ مِنْهُ وَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ
وَاتُّوا الزَّكَاةَ وَأَقْرِضُوا اللَّهَ قَرْضًا حَسَنًا وَمَا تُقَدِّمُوا لِأَنْفُسِكُمْ مِنْ خَيْرٍ تَجِدُوهُ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ هُوَ
خَيْرًا وَأَعْظَمَ أَجْرًا وَاسْتَغْفِرُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ (٢٠)

In the name of Allah, the Most-Gracious, the Ever-Merciful.

O ye enfolded in the shawl! Stand by night, but a little. Half the night, or decrease it a little or increase it a little more and recite the Qur'ān in a slow measured tone. Soon We shall lay on you the burden of a heavy word. Indeed, this rising by night is very suitable for the heart's resolve and for the comprehension of speech. During the daytime also, you have a lot of time for glorifying the Almighty and remember the name of your Lord and devote yourself entirely to Him. He only is the Lord of the East and the West. There is no god but He. Therefore, take Him alone as your Guardian, and bear with patience what they say and with dignity ignore them. And leave the matter of these rejecters who enjoy the comforts of life to Me and give them a little respite. We have in store for them fetters and the fire of Hell and choking food and a very painful torment. On the

Day when the earth and the mountains shall tremble and the mountains shall be as if they are disbanding heaps of sand. (1-14)

To you people We have sent forth a Messenger as a witness upon you just as We sent a Messenger to the Pharaoh. Then the Pharaoh disobeyed this Messenger; so We seized him in a dreadful manner. So how then will you, if you also deny, save yourself from the Day which shall make the children old. The sky is ripping apart with its burden and the promise of God is certain to be fulfilled. This is a reminder. So whoever wants, he can take the path of His Lord. (15-19)

Your Lord, indeed, knows that you stand about two-thirds of the night or half or one-third of it, and so does a group among your Companions. And God alone appoints the day and night in due measure. He knew that you would not be able to follow this. So He turned towards you mercifully. Recite then from this Qur'ān as much as you are able to. He knows that there are those among you who will be sick and others who will be travelling to seek the bounty of God and others who will be fighting for the cause of God; recite then from this as much as is possible for you, and diligently adhere to the prayer and pay *zakāh* and lend to God a befitting loan. And whatever good you send forth for yourselves, you shall find it with God better than before and greater in reward. And keep seeking God's forgiveness: Indeed, God is Most-Forgiving, Ever-Merciful. (20)

يَا أَيُّهَا الْمَرْمَلُ^(١)

The words in which the Prophet (sws) is addressed in this verse reflect his inner state at the time of revelation of this *sūrah*.

The word *مَرْمَلُ* is actually *مُرْمَلُ* and the letter ت has been assimilated into ز. Similar, is the case with the word *مُدْتَرٍ*. It refers to a person who has enwrapped himself in his shawl. Such generally is the situation of a person who is worried because of the circumstances he is facing and is also disgruntled with the people around him. The Prophet (sws) was warning people of the punishment which was looming over them; however, these people were so indifferent and averse to this message that they would pounce on the Prophet (sws) and regard his sympathy and anxiety to be mere madness, what to speak of listening to this message. In such circumstances, it was but natural for the Prophet (sws) to remain worried and thoughtful, and in this state of anxiety, a person's greatest sympathizer is his shawl, as indicated earlier. He can just wrap himself in it whenever he wants and dissociate from his fellow brethren and associate more closely with his Creator. It also needs to be kept in

1. O ye enfolded in the shawl!

consideration that a shawl was an essential part of the Arabic dress of those times, and the Prophet (sws) would also keep a shawl with him.

It is evident from various narratives that even before being called to prophethood, the Prophet (sws) was earnestly searching for the truth. He would remain secluded in a very similar manner as described in this verse until he was shown the light by the Almighty, as is referred to in Sūrah Duḥā. Later these same feelings overcame him when he personally experienced the aversion of his sick nation to its medicine and its animosity towards its healer. The word مُرْمَلٌ is pointing to the feelings of the Prophet (sws) which he experienced in this state.

Some of our exegetes are of the opinion that the Prophet (sws) has been addressed in this manner because he was sleeping while enwrapped in his shawl and this verse directed him to get up and stand in prayer before his Lord. This interpretation is interesting because it seems to be in harmony with subsequent verses; however, in my opinion, this view is incorrect. Never in any phase of his life was the Prophet Muḥammad among people who would sleep without any worry enwrapped in a shawl. He would always sleep in a state of worry, and like the day a better part of his night would also be spent in worry and in remembering God. There is not a single verse in the Qur'ān which in any manner insinuates that the Prophet (sws) was ever admonished for being indifferent to God. Quite contrary to this, he has been often lovingly chided in the Qur'ān for burdening himself with much more than what was required of him by the Almighty. However, we do find in the Qur'ān at various places a mention of his worry and anxiety when he began to encounter hardship in his preaching mission; in order to strengthen his resolve and to relieve him of his worries, on such instances he was advised to stand up in prayer, in particular the *tahajjud* prayer. In my opinion, the verse under discussion is one such instance.

فَمُ اللَّيْلِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا (۲) نِصْفَهُ أَوْ انْقُصْ مِنْهُ قَلِيلًا (۳) أَوْ زِدْ عَلَيْهِ وَرَتِّلِ الْقُرْآنَ تَرْتِيلًا (۴)²

Mentioned in these verses is the way the Prophet (sws) should adopt to alleviate his worry and anxiety reflected in the word مُرْمَلٌ. In fact, when he was faced with worries in the cause of his preaching mission, the Qur'ān prescribed precisely the same remedy to him. I have tried as best as I could to explain the underlying wisdom in this. In this *sūrah*, since the effectiveness of the remedy and its value have been explained subsequently, I will content myself to merely explaining these verses. It

2. Stand by night, but a little. Half the night, or decrease it a little or increase it a little more and recite the Qur'ān in a slow measured tone.

will *inshallāh* become evident from this the blessings which are concealed for a true believer if he offers the *tahajjud* prayer. It will also become clear how this prayer rejuvenates his energy and strengthens his faith and resolve.

In the verses *فُمُ اللَّيْلِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا نِصْفَهُ أَوْ انْقُصْ مِنْهُ قَلِيلًا أَوْ زِدْ عَلَيْهِ* night refers to the last half of the night when a person gets up after sleeping awhile. The subsequently mentioned expression *نَاشِئَةَ اللَّيْلِ* refers to this. It is this time for the *tahajjud* prayer which is evident from the practice of the Prophet (sws) and is also very apt for the objective it has been prescribed. This time period can be equal to half the night and it can also be lesser than it or a little more. It is very difficult to wake up in the later part of the night and there is always the possibility that one is not able to get up at the right time; for this reason, some latitude has been given with regard to the time span so that this may reduce any hardship. Although it is evident from the words of the Qur'ān that standing in prayer for half of the night is more blessed than other time span; however, there is a possibility of slight variation in this.

In the expression *وَرَتَّلِ الْقُرْآنَ تَرْتِيلًا*, we are informed of the right way of reading the Qur'ān in this prayer: it should be read in a slow measured tone. Consequently, it is evident from various narratives that the Prophet (sws) would read the Qur'ān with a melodious and tuneful voice and would stop at each verse. At times, he would repeat a single verse many times, overcome with emotion. Moreover, he would seek refuge with the Almighty on verses which would depict punishment and torment and express gratitude on verses which would depict mercy. As an immediate compliance to some verses which would implicitly or explicitly ask him to prostrate, he would bow down in prostration.

It is this way of recital which is in accordance with the guidance of God and is also recorded in Prophetic narratives. Moreover, it is this very way which could be of benefit vis-a-vis the purpose of revelation of the Qur'ān. However, this way of reading the Qur'ān only remained in currency so long as people regarded it to be a Book worthy of reflection and deliberation and a source of guidance for their life. Later, when Qur'ānic recital became only a means of gathering reward for one's own self or transferring the reward of the recital to a departed soul, it came to be read in the manner it is being read by our memorizers in the *tarāwīḥ* and the *shabānah* prayers.

إِنَّا سَنُلْقِي عَلَيْكَ قَوْلًا ثَقِيلًا (٥)³

Mentioned in these words is the great objective for which the Prophet (sws) was directed to stand up in prayer by night. It is in preparation for and as an initial training to bear the burden of a heavy word that he was asked to do this. Our exegetes differ in ascertaining what this heavy word refers to. My mentor Ḥamīd al-Dīn Farāhī regards it to mean the responsibility of open warning (*indhār ‘ām*) mentioned in Sūrah Muddaththir in the following words: يَا أَيُّهَا الْمُدَّثِّرُ قُمْ فَأَنْذِرْ (٧٤: ١-٢) (O ye enfolded in the shawl! Arise and warn people, (74:1-2)). I also would endorse this view because it was after this phase of delivering open warning that the phases of acquittal (*barā’ah*), migration (*hijrah*) and war (*qitāl*) ensued. These which were the toughest phases of the life of the Prophet (sws) in which both he and his companions passed through such severe tests that one shudders merely on imagining them.

It is evident from this discussion that the Prophet (sws) was directed to stand in the *tahajjud* prayer to prepare for the great *jihād* which he and his companions were about to face in their struggle for the establishment of Islam. It is this distinctive feature of the struggle which distinguishes it from all other movements. Before other material means are provided for it, it is essential that its participants have a true comprehension of God, a strong faith, an unshakable resolve and complete trust and conviction in the Almighty. The sole method to achieve these traits is the prayer – in fact the *tahajjud* prayer on the condition that it is offered the way we have been directed to offer it. It is on this bedrock that the struggle for the establishment of Islam rests. If the edifice of religion is raised without this foundation, then it will collapse even before it comes into being.

إِنَّ نَاشِئَةَ اللَّيْلِ هِيَ أَشَدُّ وَطْئًا وَأَقْوَمُ قِيلًا (٦)⁴

In these verses, the Prophet (sws) is informed of the underlying reason and wisdom for being directed to stand in prayer by night.

The word نَاشِئَةُ is from the verb نَشَأَ meaning “to get up”. Like عَاقِبَةٌ, and غَافِيَةٌ it is a verbal noun. The expression نَاشِئَةُ اللَّيْلِ would mean “standing up by night”. It is evident from this word that the time of *tahajjud* begins after a person gets up from sleep which is the later part of the night. It is indeed very difficult to get up at this time since one’s sleep is dearest to one at this time; however, if a person is able to overcome this trial, then no

3. Soon We shall lay on you the burden of a heavy word.

4. Indeed, this rising by night is very suitable for the heart’s resolve and for the comprehension of speech.

time is more favourable for him to remember God and to understand His Book. A person who is blessed by the Almighty with the urge to get up at this blessed time is indeed very fortunate: firstly, he finds in himself the power and strength to overcome his base desires which become instrumental in making him capable of reforming and rehabilitating his soul; secondly, the Almighty Who is the Creator of night and day has reserved this time for sending down His blessings and favours and the doors to these blessings are opened for those who value it and come to the presence of God to ask for His mercy and blessings.

The expression أَشَدُّ وَطْئًا portrays the effects of getting up at night for the prayer: when a person gets up from his bed and after making ablutions stands up in prayer, he finds his feet are firmly grounded; this actually refers to the complete devotion of the mind, peace of the heart and vigilance of the intellect. If a person has a worried mind and a heart devoid of peace, his feet do not strongly hold ground. In this state, he is not able to carry out the smallest of tasks what to speak of big ones. In other words, by this expression, one gets to know of the inner-self of a person through his outer-self. Some exegetes have taken it to mean that getting up in the night is a means of fully trampling one's soul. Although this interpretation is linguistically possible, later verses are not in harmony with it. My interpretation has also been adopted by other exegetes; however, they have not alluded to the fact that feet being firmly grounded actually refers to the devotion and resolve of the heart and mind.

The expression وَأَقْوَمُ قِيلًا implies that since this time is specifically suited for the mind's peace and heart's attentiveness, whatever comes out of one's tongue touches the right strings of the heart and is readily received by one's intellect. A person accepts it as if it was the call of his own heart and for other listeners too its effect is very profound and most desirable. It is evident from various narratives and other indications that the incident of the jinn hearing the Qur'ān mentioned in Sūrah Jinn took place when the Prophet (sws) was reading it in the *tahajjud* prayer; they were so deeply moved by it that they not only embraced faith but also started calling others to this Book. The great caliph 'Umar (rta) too embraced faith when he once heard the Qur'ān. It is evident from these details that reading the Qur'ān in the *tahajjud* prayer according to the way taught by God is not only beneficial for the inner purification and training of the person himself but also at times is beneficial in reviving others whether they are from men or from the jinn.

إِنَّ لَكَ فِي النَّهَارِ سَبْحًا طَوِيلًا (٧)⁵

Generally people are of the opinion that this verse tells the Prophet (sws) that he has a lot of other work to do during the day. In other words, the verse says that since in the daytime the Prophet (sws) is hard pressed for time due to work and other involvements and hence seldom finds time to pray with full concentration, he should be very diligent in offering the *tahajjud* prayer in the night.

Although it is linguistically possible to interpret the word in this meaning, for various reasons I am not convinced with this interpretation.

Firstly, the Almighty has not selected the time of the *tahajjud* prayer to be the later part of the night because in the daytime a person has many other involvements; on the contrary, it is evident from many indications in the Qur'ān that in the twenty four hours of day and night, it is this specific time due to its nature that is the most appropriate for attaining the objectives to be achieved by standing in prayer by night.

Secondly, if this meaning was to be conveyed from the verse, then it could have been simply done so by the words *إِنَّ لَكَ فِي النَّهَارِ شَغْلًا كَثِيرًا* or other ones having a similar meaning. The word *سَبَّحَ* does mean “to swim” and “to walk”; however, it is not commonly used to mean “to be involved and to be busy” unless of course there is a strong intrinsic or extrinsic indication for this.

Thirdly, if the word had this meaning, then it would be more appropriate that its qualifying adjective should have been *كَثِيرًا* or *كَبِيرًا* instead of being *طَوِيلًا*.

For these reasons, I am unable to convince myself of the conventional interpretation. In my opinion, the word *تَسْبِيح* here is in its common meaning of glorifying the Almighty and the meaning of the verse is that besides the *tahajjud* prayer which the Prophet must offer at night, during the day also he has a lot of time for glorifying the Almighty which he should do. Consequently, it is known that the Prophet (sws) would diligently try to remember the Almighty in the daytime too while walking, sitting, eating and carrying out other routines of life. It is for this very reason that before embarking on every small or big life-routine, supplications offered by him have been reported down to us. If a person diligently adheres to these supplications, he will remember God at every step he takes and, with their blessing, undertakings which are seemingly of worldly nature become worship.

It also needs to be noted that what is required in religion is continual

5. During the daytime also, you have a lot of time for glorifying the Almighty.

remembrance of God. I have already elaborated on this aspect at some place in this *tafsīr*. Just as for the material life of man, breathing is essential, for his spiritual life, remembering God is essential. The body dies if breathing stops. Similarly, if a person becomes indifferent to God, his soul becomes lifeless. It is God's remembrance that keeps it fresh and alive, and the life of the heart is real life.

It also needs to be kept in consideration that calling people towards religion, and reflecting on the signs of God present in the world within man and those without, are also included in remembering the Almighty. I have explained this aspect at more than one place in this *tafsīr*. In fact, it would not be an exaggeration to say that this reflection is the most superior form of remembering God because it is through reflection that remembrance becomes really meaningful. In the absence of reflection, remembrance becomes merely an exercise of the tongue, and is not beneficial to the life of a person. I have already alluded to this aspect under the following verse of Sūrah Al-i 'Imrān: *الَّذِينَ يَذْكُرُونَ اللَّهَ قِيَامًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِهِمْ وَيَتَفَكَّرُونَ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ رَبَّنَا مَا خَلَقْتَ هَذَا بَاطِلًا سُبْحَانَكَ فَقِنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ* (those who remember God when standing, sitting, and lying down, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth, saying: "Lord! You have not created this in vain. Glory be to You! Save us from the torment of the Fire, (3:191). Readers can look up its *tafsīr*.

وَاذْكُرْ اسْمَ رَبِّكَ وَتَبَتَّلْ إِلَيْهِ تَبْتِيلًا (٨)

Both *تَبَتَّلْ* and *تَبْتِيلًا* mean devoting oneself entirely to God. It involves isolating oneself from people and seeking refuge with God's mercy. In this verse, the Prophet (sws) has been told how to cope with his distress at seeing people shunning the truth and at being hurt by them: on such occasions, he should cut himself off from people who do not value the truth and seek refuge with the mercy of his Lord. For this purpose, the only thing that is required is to remember His name. When he does so, the Almighty will Himself enshroud him in His mercy.

It needs to be kept in mind that all names of God reflect His attributes, and it is on these attributes that the edifice of religion and faith stands. If a person keeps fresh a true knowledge of these attributes, he would find himself being backed by such a large army that the army of Satan would appear trivial before him. He would find himself to be firmer than mountains. On the other hand, if a person does not have a true comprehension of divine attributes or this comprehension becomes

weak, then his belief will become baseless or weak. As a result, he will find every outbreak of lightning striking his own shelter.

رَبُّ الْمَشْرِقِ وَالْمَغْرِبِ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ فَاتَّخِذْهُ وَكِيلًا (٩)⁷

The implication of this verse is that God's refuge is not weak and frail; it is the refuge of the God of the East and the West. No one is god except Him so that no one is His partner and so that no one can cause hindrance in the implementation of His intentions. If the Prophet (sws) makes Him his guardian, He will suffice, as is also mentioned in (٨١:٤) وَكَفَى بِاللَّهِ وَكِيلًا.

وَاصْبِرْ عَلَىٰ مَا يَقُولُونَ وَاهْجُرْهُمْ هَجْرًا جَمِيلًا (١٠)⁸

The Prophet (sws) is directed in this verse to be patient on the vain talk of his opponents and to strongly adhere to his view. He should neither be sorrowful at what they say nor get after them too much; he should just ignore them in a dignified manner for they themselves will bear the consequences of this attitude.

Leaving someone alone can be done in two ways: one is to leave him alone after humiliating and cursing him with the intention of animosity and revenge. This is what is generally adopted by people who are slaves to this world. The righteous and the pious never adopt this attitude. Their efforts to reform their fellow brethren is not because they have some personal interest in this; they do this for the guidance of the people and to please their Lord. If people harass or disregard them, then instead of being angry and showing hate, they feel sad on their state of affairs and sorrowful at the terrible fate these people will meet. In this situation, they might ignore and leave alone their people, but this leaving alone is much like the leaving alone of a father of his disobedient son. It is this leaving alone which is called هَجْرًا جَمِيلًا in this verse. Such abandoning is very beneficial at times. Those who have even a small trace of goodness in them are moved by this decent behaviour and are led into analyzing their own demeanour. At least they realize that the person will never accept their evil stance come what may. As long as a prophet remains among his people, he faces the excesses of his people with such dignified patience. However, when the Almighty decides to punish these people, the prophet announces his acquittal from them and dissociates from them. This dissociation is a prelude to their destruction.

7. He only is the Lord of the East and the West. There is no god but He. Therefore, take Him alone as your Guardian.

8. And bear with patience what they say and with dignity ignore them.

وَذَرْنِي وَالْمُكَذِّبِينَ أُولِيَ النَّعْمَةِ وَمَهَلْهُمْ قَلِيلًا (١١)⁹

In this verse, the Almighty has very sternly warned the rejecters by addressing the Prophet (sws). The implication is that the Almighty will really make an example out of them.

The style of the expression *وَذَرْنِي وَالْمُكَذِّبِينَ* is reflective of the fact that the Prophet (sws) should just isolate himself from these rejecters and let the Almighty alone take care of them; he does not need to do anything.

Concealed in this verse is also the message that if there is a delay in the destruction of these disbelievers, it is because the Prophet (sws) is still among them. As per a divine practice, as long as a prophet is among his people, they are not punished. If the prophet leaves them, they will be immediately annihilated. It is the misfortune of these oppressive people that they want to harm him, for it is he who is actually shielding them from the wrath of God. If they deprive themselves of this shield, who will save them from torment and affliction?

The expression *أُولِيَ النَّعْمَةِ* refers to rich and affluent people. The word *نَعْمَةٌ* means “riches and affluence”. By citing this attribute of the disbelievers, the purpose is to bring to light the real reason of their denial and to censure them on their ingratitude. The implication is that if the Almighty had blessed them with wealth and affluence, they should have been grateful to Him; on the contrary, this God-given affluence made them arrogant and haughty and they rose against their Lord.

إِنَّ لَدَيْنَا أَنْكَالًا وَجَحِيمًا (١٢) وَطَعَامًا ذَا غُصَّةٍ وَعَذَابًا أَلِيمًا (١٣)¹⁰

The implication of this verse is that if the God-given affluence has led them to haughtiness and rejection of the prophet, then they should remember that in the Hereafter they will be chained in fetters and thrown into Hell.

The word *أَنْكَالٌ* is a plural of *نَكْلٌ*. It means “fetters” as well as “bridles of iron”. At other instances (eg. 76:4), the words used are *سَلَاسِلٌ* and *أَغْلَالٌ*.

The expression *وَطَعَامًا ذَا غُصَّةٍ* refers to the fact that if these people do not realize the obligation they owe because of the copious food and resources they have been blessed with, they should remember that in the Hereafter they will be given food that will get stuck in their gullets, and, instead of a blissful life, they will have to encounter a painful doom.

9. And leave the matter of these rejecters who enjoy the comforts of life to Me and give them a little respite.

10. We have in store for them fetters and the fire of Hell and choking food and a very painful torment.

يَوْمَ تَرْجُفُ الْأَرْضُ وَالْجِبَالُ وَكَانَتْ الْجِبَالُ كَثِيبًا مَهِيلًا (١٤)¹¹

This is a reminder of the Day when these conceited people will face what is depicted in the verse. The earth and mountains will reel and shake in such a manner that even mountains will become like disbanding heaps of sand what to speak of the houses and palaces of the affluent.

إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَا إِلَيْكُمْ رَسُولًا شَاهِدًا عَلَيْكُمْ كَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا إِلَىٰ فِرْعَوْنَ رَسُولًا (١٥) فَعَصَىٰ فِرْعَوْنُ الرَّسُولَ فَأَخَذْنَاهُ أَخْذًا وَبِيلًا (١٦)¹²

After giving the Prophet (sws) the necessary instructions, in these verses the Quraysh are admonished that just as the Almighty had sent a Messenger to the Pharaoh, He has sent a Messenger to them. The purpose of sending a Messenger to them was to inform them of God's directives and the ways to please Him, the reward they will earn in this world and in the Hereafter if they follow these directives and the fate they will meet if they show disobedience. The implication is that they must fully comprehend the status and position of the person they are rejecting and humiliating and must know the consequences of such an attitude. He is not merely a person who asks people to accept his message or a mere preacher whose message can be treated in any way; in fact, the Almighty has sent him to them as a witness to the truth. Thus through him a judgement shall be passed regarding what is right and what is wrong. This judgement will be the one which was passed between Moses (sws) and the Pharaoh. Just as the Pharaoh was seized by the Almighty for disobeying the prophet, and seized in a manner that he could find no refuge anywhere, similarly they too will be seized by Him and seized in a manner that no one will be able to free them from His clasp.

I have fully explained the meanings of شَاهِدًا عَلَيْكُمْ under the following verse of Sūrah Baqarah: لَتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ وَيَكُونَ الرَّسُولُ عَلَيْكُمْ شَهِيدًا (١٤٣:٢) (so that you be witnesses [to the truth] before the people, and the *rasūl* be such a witness before you, (2:143). Readers can look up the *tafsīr* of this verse.

11. On the Day when the earth and the mountains shall tremble and the mountains shall be as if they are disbanding heaps of sand.

12. To you people We have sent forth a Messenger a witness upon you just as We sent a Messenger to the Pharaoh. Then the Pharaoh disobeyed this Messenger; so We seized him in a dreadful manner.

فَكَيْفَ تَتَّقُونَ إِنْ كَفَرْتُمْ يَوْمًا يَجْعَلُ الْوِلْدَانَ شِيبًا (١٧)¹³

The implication of this verse is that if the Quraysh are not being seized, then they should not think that they will never be seized. Even if this does not take place in this world, the next world is certain to come and they should contemplate its horrific nature; if they deny the Prophet (sws), how will they save themselves from the Day which will make the children old. This is actually an expression of the intensity and all-embracing nature of something horrific. We often say: "That sorrow has made me grow old." It is recorded in certain narratives that the Prophet (sws) is reported to have said: *شيبتي هود وأخواتها* (Sūrah Hūd and *sūrahs* similar to it have made me grow old).¹⁴ Arab poets have used this idiom in various styles, and is so common that parallels need not be cited. Zamakhsharī has furnished some examples which can be relied upon.

السَّمَاءُ مُنْقَطِرٌ بِهِ كَانَ وَعْدُهُ مَفْعُولًا (١٨)¹⁵

The Day of Judgement should not be regarded as far-fetched. The sky is heavily laden with its burden. It might tear apart and the Day of Judgement appear from within it while they are still in their state of ignorance and indifference. This topic is discussed in the following verse of Sūrah A'rāf thus:

ثَقُلَتْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ لَا تَأْتِيكُمُ إِلَّا بَغْتَةً (١٨٧:٧)

The heavens and the earth are burdened with it. It will come upon you suddenly. (7:187)

In other words, the Hereafter does not require any evidence. Though the time of its advent is known to no one except the Almighty, its signs are as evident in the heavens and the earth as the pregnancy of a lady in its last stage. No one can tell when she will deliver; however, everyone who sees her knows that she will deliver. In a similar manner, the signs of the Day of Judgement are obvious and the sky is about to cleave asunder with their burden; it can come anytime. Unfortunate are people who are indifferent to it merely because its exact time of arrival is not

13. So how then will you, if you also deny, save yourself from the Day which shall make the children old.

14 'Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, 3rd ed., vol. 3 (al-Yamāmah: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 1987), 368.

15. The sky is ripping apart with its burden and the promise of God is certain to be fulfilled.

known to them.

إِنَّ هَذِهِ تَذْكِرَةٌ فَمَنْ شَاءَ اتَّخَذَ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِ سَبِيلًا (١٩)¹⁶

The demonstrative pronoun “this” refers to those verses of the Qur’ān which have been conveyed to the Quraysh to remind them of the Hereafter. In other words, before sending punishment, it was essential that they be warned and admonished. So the Almighty by sending His prophet left the Quraysh with no excuse because the truth was communicated to them in its ultimate form. It was now the responsibility of the people. He who wanted could adopt the path leading to his Lord and in this manner become worthy of His pleasure and mercy and he who wanted could remain in error and also see his fate. The Almighty has no concern for him.

إِنَّ رَبَّكَ يَعْلَمُ أَنَّكَ تَقُومُ أَدْنَىٰ مِنْ ثُلُثَيِ اللَّيْلِ وَنُصْفَهُ وَثُلُثَهُ وَطَائِفَةٌ مِنَ الَّذِينَ مَعَكَ وَاللَّهُ يُقَدِّرُ اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ عَلِمَ أَنْ لَنْ تُحْصَوْهُ فَتَابَ عَلَيْكُمْ فَاقْرَءُوا مَا تَيَسَّرَ مِنَ الْقُرْآنِ عَلِمَ أَنْ سَيَكُونُ مِنْكُمْ مَرْضَىٰ وَآخَرُونَ يَضْرِبُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ يَبْتَغُونَ مِنْ فَضْلِ اللَّهِ وَآخَرُونَ يُقَاتِلُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ فَاقْرَءُوا مَا تَيَسَّرَ مِنْهُ وَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَاقْرِضُوا اللَّهَ قَرْضًا حَسَنًا وَمَا تُقَدِّمُوا لِأَنفُسِكُمْ مِنْ خَيْرٍ تَجِدُوهُ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ هُوَ خَيْرًا وَأَعْظَمَ أَجْرًا وَاسْتَغْفِرُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ (٢٠)¹⁷

This is the last verse of this *sūrah*. It is evident from its subject that it was revealed in Madīnah; however, it relates to the directive given to the Prophet (sws) about the *tahajjud* prayer right at the beginning of the *sūrah*. For this reason, it was placed at the end of this *sūrah* so that one is able to understand the relationship between the initial and final directives

16. This is a reminder. So whoever wants, he can take the path of His Lord.

17. Your Lord, indeed, knows that you stand about two-thirds of the night or half or one-third of it, and so does a group among your companions. And Allah alone appoints the day and night in due measure. He knew that you would not be able to follow this. So He turned towards you mercifully. Recite then from this Qur’ān as much as you are able to. He knows that there are among you who will be sick and others who will be travelling to seek the bounty of Allah and others who will be fighting for the cause of Allah; recite then from this as much as is possible for you, and diligently adhere to the prayer and pay *zakāh* and lend to Allah a befitting loan. And whatever good you send forth for yourselves, you shall find it with Allah better than before and greater in reward. And keep seeking Allah’s forgiveness: Indeed Allah is Most-Forgiving, Ever-Merciful.

given in this regard. Several examples of this kind have been seen in earlier *sūrahs*, and this is a very obvious corroboration of the fact that verses in a *sūrah* are placed in harmony with the meanings they signify, and that all this arrangement and placement was made under the guidance of God and His Prophet (sws).

In the sentence إِنَّ رَبَّكَ يَعْلَمُ أَنَّكَ تَقُومُ أَدْنَىٰ مِنْ ثُلُثَيِ اللَّيْلِ وَنِصْفَهُ وَثُلُثَهُ the Prophet (sws) is lauded for the fact that he was very befittingly fulfilling the directive of standing in prayer by night which the Almighty knows full well. The implication is that these endeavours of his are in the knowledge of God, and when this is so they will not go waste; he will be greatly rewarded for them.

After expressing praise for the Prophet (sws), the next part of the verse: وَطَائِفَةٌ مِنَ الَّذِينَ مَعَكَ expresses praise for the Companions who in their fervour to follow him adopted the *tahajjud* prayer as a mandatory practice of their own accord. This directive was specifically related to the Prophet (sws) as is evident from its wording; however, the Companions would leap to do every deed they would see the Prophet (sws) do. Although the real requirement of faith in the Prophet (sws) is to follow him in each and every step he takes, there is a world of difference between power of endurance of a prophet and that of common people. For this reason, the Almighty altered this directive for common Muslims. The next section of the verse describes this change. The reason of course being that its burden not exceed their power of endurance.

The next section of the verse: وَاللَّهُ يُقَدِّرُ اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ عَلِمَ أَنْ لَنْ تُحْصَوْهُ فَتَابَ عَلَيْكُمْ says that it is the Almighty who sets the measure of night and day. It is only He who knows their requirements and demands and the various aspects with regard to which they affect life. It is also He alone who knows which of these are needed by man and the circumstances and difficulties through which he has to pass. In the light of His knowledge, His verdict is that the Companions will not be able to stand up in prayer for half the night or one third or two thirds of the night; hence they should stand up in prayer to read the Qur'ān as much as they are able to.

I have already explained the meaning of the expression فَتَابَ عَلَيْكُمْ in an earlier *sūrah*. When the verb تَابَ comes with the preposition عَنِ, it means “to turn to someone graciously”.

Though the words فَافْرَعُوا مَا تَيَسَّرَ مِنَ الْقُرْآنِ are general in style yet since they are mentioned with relation to standing in prayer by night, they refer to reading the Qur'ān in the *tahajjud* prayer. Although reciting the Qur'ān in itself is an act that entails many rewards, however, reading it in a measured tone in the *tahajjud* prayer brings the blessings for which

the Prophet (sws) has been so emphatically asked to adopt this practice.

It is evident from this discussion that this relief was given to common Muslims because they would not have been able to abide by this taxing directive. As far as the Prophet (sws) himself was concerned, he abided by this directive till his very last breath. For a common Muslim, this prayer is still an optional act which earns great rewards, and the extent of time in which he should stand in this prayer has been left to his vigour and zeal.

The next part of the verse: عَلِمَ أَنْ سَيَكُونُ مِنْكُمْ مَرْضَىٰ وَآخَرُونَ يَضْرِبُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ فَاقْرَءُوا مَا تَيَسَّرَ مِنْهُ فِي الْأَرْضِ مِنْ يَبْتِغُونَ مِنْ فَضْلِ اللَّهِ وَآخَرُونَ يُقَاتِلُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ فَاقْرَءُوا مَا تَيَسَّرَ مِنْهُ refers to every journey which is undertaken for a noble and higher cause whether it is for seeking knowledge or for offering the *hajj* or for doing business. For trade journeys, this expression is used many times in the Qur'an.

The words وَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَأَقْرِضُوا اللَّهَ قَرْضًا حَسَنًا informs us of how to compensate for not being able to pray the *tahajjud*; if people are not able to fully benefit from the blessings of this prayer, they should be vigilant in the five prayers as much as possible, and spend their money for the cause of God, which includes spending it for the supremacy of the word of God and for emergency needs related to religion and state.

The expression وَأَقْرِضُوا اللَّهَ قَرْضًا حَسَنًا can refer to all types of generous spending for the cause of God; however, when it is mentioned with *zakāh* it refers to the spending which is done for the requirements of war or for some emergency need.

The words وَمَا تَقَدَّمُوا لَأَنْفُسِكُمْ مِنْ خَيْرٍ تَجِدُوهُ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ هُوَ خَيْرٌ وَأَعْظَمَ أَجْرًا urge the believers to spend in the way of God: they are told that this spending will not be for others; it will, in fact, benefit their own selves. It will accumulate in their own accounts with God, and they will find it in a very beneficial form when they go to their Lord. The implication is that this spending is not an unprofitable undertaking; it is the most profitable of trades.

The words وَأَسْتَغْفِرُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ refer to the fact that besides diligently doing what is mentioned above, believers should continue to seek forgiveness from their Lord for their sins and blemishes, and hope that He will forgive them. He is Most-Forgiving and Ever-Merciful.

With the grace of God, I come to the end of this *sūrah's tafsīr*. I pray that He forgive my sins and make hearts receptive to the truth. وَاللَّهُ هُوَ الْمَوْفِقُ لِلصَّوَابِ (It is He who produces the urge in a person for the truth).

Raḥmānābād,

7th November, 1978 AD

5th Dhū al-Ḥajj, 1398 AH

Sūrah Muddaththir

Central Theme and Relationship with the Previous *Sūrah*

This *sūrah* is the counterpart of Sūrah Muzzammil, the previous *sūrah*: There is no essential difference between the central themes of both *sūrahs*. Even their names share the same meaning. The previous *sūrah* directs the Prophet (sws) to prepare for bearing the burden of a heavy word. It is this *sūrah* which explicitly explains what is meant by bearing this burden: he should prepare himself to take up the responsibility of *indhār* (warning people of the Hereafter) and should strongly adhere to his stance even if people violently oppose him. He should leave their matter to God and always remember that his responsibility is solely to remind people through this Qur'ān. He is not responsible for making them accept it. Only those people will accept it, who in accordance with the law and practice of God, are worthy of this acceptance. Those who are not worthy shall always remain indifferent to it however much the Prophet (sws) tries to guide them.

Analysis of the Discourse

Following is an analysis of the discourse of this *sūrah*.

Verses (1-10): The Prophet (sws) is directed to discharge his mission of warning people of the Hereafter with full preparation. He should declare the greatness of His Lord and cleanse and purge his heart from everything which may tarnish it. He should keep himself away from all traces of polytheism and continue with his efforts. For the sake of his Lord, he should hold his ground against all hostilities. The Almighty will make all his efforts bear fruit and the call of Islam will be spread far and wide.

Verses (11-17): The Prophet (sws) should well inform the people about the afflictions of the Day of Judgement. The Day shall be very severe for the disbelievers and they should not consider it to be an easy affair. Those who, inebriated by their riches and status, reckon that on the Day of Judgement, if it comes at all, they shall be given even more than what they presently have, must remember a bare fact: when the Almighty had created them from the wombs of their mothers they were totally alone in this world; they neither had wealth nor status at that time. It was the Almighty who blessed them with wealth and status; but instead of being

grateful to their Lord, conceit and vanity overcame them and they held that whatever they had was their right by birth and they would be blessed with even more in the Hereafter. This, it is clear, is a totally false claim. If as a result of this, they rise against the Qur'ān, then they should remember that they will have to face a very severe penalty.

Verses (18-25): A depiction of the excuse fashioned by the arrogant leaders of Quraysh to deny the Qur'ān and of the disdainful way in which they actually presented this excuse. Sorrow is expressed at this attitude. It is very unfortunate that their estimation about the Qur'ān is totally wrong: they reckoned it to be a miracle of a prophet's stirring and eloquent speech and never paid attention to its warning; the fact of the matter is that each and every sentence of it is a reality which they will soon encounter.

Verses (26-31): A description of Hell which the disbelievers will encounter. These disbelievers used to indulge in vain talk about it. An assertion of the fact that since these disbelievers are overcome by the false claim that they have knowledge of everything, they will make fun of this description and say that such statements are of no use. The truth of the matter is that this description is based on the wisdom of the Almighty. Those who have the desire for the truth will benefit from it, while those who in spite of their ignorant claim of being know-alls will adopt an attitude which shall ruin their fate.

Verses (32-48): An argument on the Hereafter from the manifestations of nature is presented and wonder is expressed at the ignorance of those who are unmindful of the greatest upheaval of the universe. The Qur'ān is informing them about it so that all those who want to prepare for it can do so and those who want to evade it are left with no excuse but stubbornness. They should remember that on that Day each person will be held in pledge for his own deeds. Only his deeds will liberate him or lead him to the torment of Hell. No one's deeds or intercession will be of any benefit for any other person. Only the companions of the right hand (*ashāb al-yamīn*) will be declared as the victors; they shall live comfortably in Paradise and from there they will inquire from those who will be put in Hell as to what led them to it. In reply, the dwellers of Hell will openly confess the crimes which led them to their state of doom.

Verses (49-52): Wonder is expressed at those who are fleeing from the Message of the Qur'ān and the real reason which is making them flee is indicated. The Prophet (sws) is directed to ignore them. His responsibility is only to remind them. Those who do not benefit from this, will see for themselves its dire consequences. Only those shall benefit from it who according to the Almighty's laws deserve to benefit from it.

Text and Translation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

يَا أَيُّهَا الْمُدَّثِّرُ (١) قُمْ فَأَنْذِرْ (٢) وَرَبِّكَ فَكَبِّرْ (٣) وَثِيَابَكَ فَطَهِّرْ (٤) وَالرُّجْزَ فَاهْجُرْ (٥)
وَلَا تَمْنُنْ تَسْتَكْثِرُ (٦) وَلِرَبِّكَ فَاصْبِرْ (٧) فَإِذَا نُقِرَ فِي النَّاقُورِ (٨) فَذَلِكَ يَوْمٌ مِثْلُ يَوْمِ عَسِيرٍ
(٩) عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ غَيْرُ يَسِيرٍ (١٠) ذَرْنِي وَمَنْ خَلَقْتُ وَحِيدًا (١١) وَجَعَلْتُ لَهُ مَالًا مَمْدُودًا
(١٢) وَبَنِينَ شُهودًا (١٣) وَمَهَّدْتُ لَهُ تَمْهِيدًا (١٤) ثُمَّ يَطْمَعُ أَنْ أَزِيدَ (١٥) كَلَّا إِنَّهُ كَانَ
لَا يَأْتِنَا غَنِيْدًا (١٦) سَأَرْهِفُهُ صَعُودًا (١٧) إِنَّهُ فَكَّرَ وَقَدَّرَ (١٨) فَقُتِلَ كَيْفَ قَدَّرَ (١٩) ثُمَّ
قُتِلَ كَيْفَ قَدَّرَ (٢٠) ثُمَّ نَظَرَ (٢١) ثُمَّ عَبَسَ وَبَسَرَ (٢٢) ثُمَّ أَدْبَرَ وَاسْتَكْبَرَ (٢٣) فَقَالَ إِنْ
هَذَا إِلَّا سِحْرٌ يُؤْتَرُ (٢٤) إِنْ هَذَا إِلَّا قَوْلُ الْبَشَرِ (٢٥) سَأُصْلِيهِ سَقَرَ (٢٦) وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا
سَقَرُ (٢٧) لَا تُبْقِي وَلَا تَذَرُ (٢٨) لَوَاحَةٌ لِلْبَشَرِ (٢٩) عَلَيْهَا تِسْعَةَ عَشَرَ (٣٠) وَمَا جَعَلْنَا
أَصْحَابَ النَّارِ إِلَّا مَلَائِكَةً وَمَا جَعَلْنَا عِدَّتَهُمْ إِلَّا فِتْنَةً لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لِيَسْتَيْقِنَ الَّذِينَ
أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ وَيَزْدَادَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِيمَانًا وَلَا يَرْتَابَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ
وَلِيَقُولَ الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ مَرَضٌ وَالْكَافِرُونَ مَاذَا أَرَادَ اللَّهُ بِهَذَا مَثَلًا كَذَلِكَ يُضِلُّ اللَّهُ
مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَمَا يَعْلَمُ جُنُودَ رَبِّكَ إِلَّا هُوَ وَمَا هِيَ إِلَّا ذِكْرَى لِلْبَشَرِ (٣١)
كَلَّا وَالْقَمَرَ (٣٢) وَاللَّيْلَ إِذَا أَدْبَرَ (٣٣) وَالصُّبْحَ إِذَا أَسْفَرَ (٣٤) إِنَّهَا لَإِحْدَى الْكُبَرِ (٣٥)
نَذِيرًا لِلْبَشَرِ (٣٦) لِمَنْ شَاءَ مِنْكُمْ أَنْ يَتَقَدَّمَ أَوْ يَتَأَخَّرَ (٣٧) كُلُّ نَفْسٍ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ
رَهِينَةٌ (٣٨) إِلَّا أَصْحَابَ الْيَمِينِ (٣٩) فِي جَنَّاتٍ يَتَسَاءَلُونَ (٤٠) عَنِ الْمُجْرِمِينَ (٤١) مَا
سَلَكَكُمْ فِي سَقَرٍ (٤٢) قَالُوا لَمْ نَكُ مِنَ الْمَصْلِينَ (٤٣) وَلَمْ نَكُ نَطْعُمُ الْمَسْكِينِ (٤٤)
وَكُنَّا نَخُوضُ مَعَ الْخَائِضِينَ (٤٥) وَكُنَّا نُكَذِّبُ بَيُّومَ الدِّينِ (٤٦) حَتَّى أَتَانَا الْيَقِينُ (٤٧)
فَمَا تَنْفَعُهُمْ شَفَاعَةُ الشَّافِعِينَ (٤٨) فَمَا لَهُمْ عَنِ التَّذْكِرَةِ مُعْرِضِينَ (٤٩) كَانَتْهُمْ حُمْرُ
مُسْتَنْفَرَةٍ (٥٠) فَرَّتْ مِنْ قَسْوَرَةٍ (٥١) بَلْ يُرِيدُ كُلُّ امْرِئٍ مِنْهُمْ أَنْ يُؤْتَى صُحُفًا مُنَشَّرَةً (٥٢)
كَلَّا بَلْ لَا يَخَافُونَ الْآخِرَةَ (٥٣) كَلَّا إِنَّهُ تَذْكِرَةٌ (٥٤) فَمَنْ شَاءَ ذَكَرْهُ (٥٥) وَمَا يَذْكُرُونَ إِلَّا
أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ هُوَ أَهْلُ التَّقْوَى وَأَهْلُ الْمَعْرِفَةِ (٥٦)

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Ever Merciful.

O ye enfolded in the shawl! Arise and warn people. And proclaim the greatness of your Lord only, and cleanse the apparel [of your heart] and

keep away from impurity and do not discontinue your endeavour regarding it to be more. And show perseverance in the way of your Lord. (1-7)

Thus, when the trumpet is sounded, that Day will be very severe. It will not be easy for the disbelievers. Leave to Me whom I have created alone and bestowed abundant wealth and sons abiding in his presence and fully smoothed out for him the way. Still he expects that I shall give him more. Certainly not! He has turned out to be an enemy of Our revelations. Soon I will make him climb a mounting slope. (8-17)

He pondered and schemed. Cursed be he; what he schemed! Then cursed be he, what a wrong scheme he made. Then he looked about. Then he frowned and made a face. Then he turned away and became arrogant. Then said: "This is nothing but a magic which is being handed down from the past! It is nothing but the word of man!" (18-25)

I will soon cast him into Hell. And what have you understood what Hell is? It will neither show mercy nor spare anyone. It scorches the skin. Over it are nineteen angels. (26-30)

And We have appointed none but angels as the keepers of Hell and have mentioned their number only to make it a test for those who have disbelieved. So that the People of the Book receive assurance from this and the believers may increase in their faith and that the People of the Book and the believers have no doubt about it. And so that those who have an ailment in their hearts and those who have disbelieved say: "What can God mean by this mention?" In this way, God leads astray whom He pleases and guides whom He pleases. And no one knows the armies of your Lord except He. And this matter is just a reminder for man. (31)

Certainly not! The moon bears witness and the night also when it turns its back and the morning when it shines forth that this matter is from among the great matters narrated to warn man. For every person among you who wants to advance forward or wants to turn away. Every soul shall be held in pledge for its own deeds. The only exception will be the people of the right hand. They will be in gardens inquiring after the wrongdoers. They will ask: "What has brought you into Hell?" They will reply: "We were not among those who prayed nor did we feed the poor and we used to quibble with these quibblers and used to deny this Day of Reckoning till there came to us this moment of certainty." (32-47)

So, no intercession of the intercessors will be of any use to them. What then is the matter with them that they are turning away from the Reminder, as though they are frightened asses fleeing from a lion? In fact, each one of them desires that he be handed open scrolls. Certainly not! They, in fact, have no fear of the Hereafter. Certainly not! This is just a Reminder. So let him, who wills, take heed – and they will not take heed unless God so wills. He alone is pious and worthy of being forgiven. (48-56)

Explanation

يَا أَيُّهَا الْمُدَّثِّرُ (١) قُمْ فَأَنْذِرْ (٢)¹

The words مُدَّثِّر and مُزْمَل are synonymous. The latter is from دَثَّر and refers to a shawl a person that uses to cover himself while sleeping.

As I have explained in the exegesis of the previous *sūrah*, covering one's self with a shawl is a symbol of being pensive and worried. The experiences of divine contact which the Prophet (sws) went through at the beginning of his prophethood were in themselves very onerous. When he mentioned these experiences to his family and they started to make fun of them, his worries increased. In these circumstances, he would wear his shawl and mostly remain in seclusion the way a worried person behaves. To alleviate his worries, the Almighty lovingly addressed him as *muzzammil* and *muddaththir* so that this very address could be a source of comfort for him. It shows that the Almighty is well aware of his circumstances and when He has addressed the Prophet (sws) in such an affectionate manner, then He will surely alleviate his worries. Consequently, in the previous *sūrah*, he was addressed by the title *muzzammil* and asked to stand in prayer by night. This of course was meant to be a cure for his worries and also a preparation for a new assignment which would be later spelled out to him.

The words قُمْ فَأَنْذِر spell out this new assignment which was referred to in the previous verse by the words: إِنَّا سَنُلْقِي عَلَيْكَ قَوْلًا ثَقِيلًا (٥: ٧٣) (soon We shall lay on you the burden of a heavy word, (73:5)). He should arise and with full determination and resolve, warn his people and not worry of the opposition, resistance nor of the adverse and alien circumstances he was facing. If he takes up this task with grit and endurance, the Almighty will ease the way for him and strengthen him with His special divine help. I have already explained in the previous *sūrah* under 73:5 quoted earlier that these words refer to the obligation of delivering open warning to his people mentioned in this *sūrah*. Generally, people have interpreted the expression قَوْلٌ ثَقِيلٌ to mean divine revelation itself. However, divine revelations had already begun; so what was reason for saying: "I shall soon reveal to you a heavy word." On the other hand, the obligation of *indhār* (warning) was no doubt a burdensome directive. It was not at all easy to sound the message of *tawhīd* in the ears of the leaders of Makkah and Tā'if and that too with the claim that he was a Messenger of God and that if they denied his open warnings, they would be grievously punished. It was but natural for the Prophet (sws) to become apprehensive of such a

1. O ye enfolded in the shawl! Arise and warn people.

heavy responsibility. Consequently, in the initial period, he confined his preaching to his immediate family. To them too, he only communicated certain observations and experiences of his prophethood in order to elicit their reaction. This reaction in fact was of great animosity. Thus, in this period, he would often remain very anxious and worried. The words مُدَّثِّرٌ and مُزْمَلٌ portray this very state of his. The purpose for which the Almighty had sent him had to be fulfilled at all costs. So he was directed first in Sūrah Muzzammil to prepare for this situation and then in this sūrah, he was directed to fully embark on the mission of extending his sphere of preaching and deliver warnings to all the people around him.

وَرَبِّكَ فَكَبِّرْ²(٣)

This is the first directive of *indhār* referred to earlier. The belief of *tawhīd* (monotheism) has formed the basic ingredient in the preaching mission of the prophets of God; this meant the proclamation of God's greatness and exaltedness alone. Since the object of the verb in this verse has been placed before the verb, it has resulted in specifying this declaration for God only. In other words, whoever other than God claim greatness or whose greatness is claimed by others are all false and baseless. The Prophet (sws) should only proclaim the greatness of God. In the *jāhili* society of Arabia, this declaration was no less than inviting the wrath and anger of the whole society. However, since the foundation of religion is on *tawhīd*, every prophet was required to openly declare it without showing any hesitation.

وَتِيَابَكَ فَطَهِّرْ³(٤)

The word تِيَابٌ is the plural of ثِيَابٌ and means “cloth”. However, it can also refer to the heart. In fact, a study of classical Arabic shows that this word also means “the heart's apparel”. Imru' u al-Qays has said:

وإن تك قد ساءتك مني خليفة

فصلي ثيابي من ثيابك تنسل

(If any of my actions has upset you, then separate your heart's apparel from mine, and you will be separated from me.)⁴

2. And proclaim the greatness of your Lord only.

3. And cleanse the apparel [of your heart].

4. Imru' al-Qays, *Dīwān*, 2.

In this couplet, the poet has used the word ثياب to connote the heart, and this meaning can only be taken when it is metaphorically understood to mean “the heart’s apparel”.

Imru’u al-Qays has also said:

ثياب بني عوف طهاري نقية

(The hearts of Banū ‘Awf are absolutely clean)⁵

While keeping this meaning of the word ثِيَاب in mind, the verse would mean that the Prophet (sws) should declare the greatness and oneness of God without any fear. However much as his opponents may force him and make various excuses, he should not let the slightest trace of polytheism contaminate his heart. It should remain clear that the Qur’ān in very explicit terms has called the polytheists filthy and polytheism filth. The Prophet (sws) has been given this directive because in the later phases of his mission the leaders of the Quraysh presented a compromising formula as per which they would accept all what he said on the condition that he agree to regard some status to their deities. However, the Prophet (sws) emphatically rejected this demand and he was also directed by the Almighty that *tawhīd* is the basis of religion and that he should not compromise in any way in this matter. Verses such as (وَدُّوا لَوْ تُدْهِنُ فَيُدْهِنُونَ (٦٨: ٩) (they desire that you be flexible, then they will also become flexible, (68:9)) and others refer to this very aspect. In the verse under discussion too, the Prophet (sws) has been categorically told to strictly adhere to *tawhīd*. In other words, by addressing the Prophet (sws) and giving him this directive it is actually the Idolaters who are told that polytheism is such filth that a Messenger of God does not even tolerate its slightest trace.

وَالرُّجْزَ فَاهْجُرْ (٥)

The words رَجَس, رَجَز and رُجَز have very similar pronunciations and also are similar in meaning. The word رُجَز is used for the filth which makes a person feel abhorrence and disgust. It can refer to every type of filth, but here it specifically refers to the filth of polytheism, and the purpose is to stress what is said in the previous verse: وَثِيَابَكَ فَطَهِّرْ (and cleanse your heart’s apparel).

This directive was not required to be given to the Prophet (sws) because there was no chance of him being involved in it in any way. Just

5. Ibid., 28.

6. And keep away from impurity.

as he remained a staunch and pure monotheist after becoming a prophet, there was not the slightest trace of polytheism found in his beliefs even before this. The objective was to communicate to the disbelievers and the Idolaters that the warner who had come to them had a very definite stance on polytheism and that he had other very clear injunctions from his Lord.

وَلَا تَمُنْ تَسْتَكْثِرُ⁷(٦)

Just as the word مَنَّ means to do a favour to someone, it also means to cut something. In Sūrah Qalam, it is said: إِنَّ لَكَ لَأَجْرًا غَيْرَ مَمْنُونٍ (٦٨:٣) (and indeed for you is a reward unending, (68:3)). The implication of the verse under discussion is that he must continue with the preaching and warning mission he has been asked to undertake, and not discontinue it thinking that he has done it to a great extent and that it was not required any more. He should carry on this divinely assigned task and only discontinue when the Almighty tells him to do so.

Grammatically, the word تَسْتَكْثِرُ is not the response to the negative sentence. Had it been so, it would have had a *jazm*. Though some reciters have read it with a *jazm*, however since the *mutawātir* recital is that of *dammah*, hence, I would prefer to read it thus, and have interpreted it with a *dammah*. In such a case, the word should either be regarded to be in the capacity of an accusative of state (*ḥāl*) or an independent sentence. In my opinion, it is the former.

The word اِسْتَكْثَرُ generally has two meanings. Firstly, to do something a lot or to want something a lot, and secondly, to regard or reckon something to be a lot. It is used in the first meaning in the following verse: وَلَوْ كُنْتُ أَعْلَمُ الْغَيْبِ لَأَسْتَكْثَرْتُ مِنَ الْخَيْرِ (١٨٨:٧) (Had I possessed knowledge of what is hidden, I would have availed myself of much that is good, (7:188)) and lexicographers have explained the second meaning thus: استكثر الشيء: رآه كثيرا أو عده كثيرا (the expression استكثر الشيء means to regard or count something to be a lot). The author of *Aqrab al-mawārid*⁸ has stated this second meaning first. In my opinion, in the verse under discussion, it denotes this very meaning. The verse, as pointed out earlier, would therefore mean that the Prophet (sws) should continue to discharge the responsibility of warning his people without any break and should never suspend it thinking that he has done a lot and that it was not required any more.

7. And do not discontinue your endeavour regarding it to be more.

8. Sa'īd al-Khūrī al-Shartūnī, *Aqrab al-mawārid fī fuṣaḥī al-'arabiyyah wa al-shawārid.*, 1st ed. Vol (Tehrān: Dār al-uswah, 1416 AH), .

This directive has been given because the divine law about a messenger's responsibility of warning his people is that if his people remain indifferent to it, then after giving them respite for a certain period of time, the Almighty necessarily destroys them. I have explained this law at many places in this *tafsīr*. As per this law, this time is given to them so that the truth is communicated to them to such an extent that they are left with no legitimate excuse to deny it, and only the Almighty knows how much time should be granted to a people for this purpose. The obligation of the messenger is to continue to communicate the truth and warn them of the grave consequences of denying it until the Almighty asks him to stop and tells him that he has completed his task; now he should consign their fate to Him and migrate from that land. If a messenger decides to migrate on the basis of his own assessment that he has completed his assignment, then there is a strong chance that he might end up wrongly assessing the situation and make the same mistake as Jonah (sws) made. He was rebuked by the Almighty for this decision and after putting him through a severe trial he was sent back by the Almighty to his assignment with his people. It was after he resumed this assignment and continued with it that the Almighty blessed all his people with the urge to accept faith.

In order to protect the Prophet Muḥammad (sws) from a similar expression of haste, the Almighty in the very first phase, bade him to carry out without any break, his divinely appointed task of warning his people; he should never decide for himself to discontinue this responsibility thinking he had done enough. In other words, this decision must not be taken by him; it has to be taken by God. Thus verses like (٤٨ : ٦٨) *فَاصْبِرْ لِحُكْمِ رَبِّكَ وَلَا تَكُنْ كَصَاحِبِ الْحُوتِ* (so with patience, wait for the judgement of your Lord and be not like the companion of the fish, (68:48)) instruct the Prophet (sws) to exercise patience and here in this *sūrah* too, the next verse conveys precisely the same message to the Prophet (sws).

Our exegetes have generally interpreted this verse to mean that the Prophet (sws) must not do a favour to someone thinking that he will receive a greater favour in return. Although it is possible to interpret this verse in this way, a question arises on this interpretation viz a viz the occasion and context of this verse. In the given context and background, what is the need for such advice for the Prophet (sws)? In my opinion, our exegetes have faltered in ascertaining the correct meaning of both words of this verse. My explanation of the verse has brought forth its true interpretation; there is no need for any further discussion on it.

وَلِرَبِّكَ فَاصْبِرْ⁹ (٧)

This verse has precisely the same meaning as: *وَاصْبِرْ لِحُكْمِ رَبِّكَ فَإِنَّكَ بِأَعْيُنِنَا* (52:48) (therefore, with perseverance wait the judgement of your Lord: We are watching over you, (52:48)). When the word *اصْبِرْ* is used with the preposition *لِ*, it means to wait with patience and perseverance.

The directive given in this verse relates to the previous verse: the Prophet (sws) should not discontinue his endeavour at some stage regarding it to be sufficient; he should continue with it with patience and perseverance and wait for the decision of his Lord. On this perseverance hinges not only his own success but also the communication of the truth to his people to the extent that they are not left with any excuse to deny it.

فَإِذَا نُقِرَ فِي النَّاقُورِ (٨) فَذَلِكَ يَوْمٌ عَسِيرٌ (٩) عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ غَيْرُ يَسِيرٍ (١٠)¹⁰

Mentioned in this verse is the real subject of Prophetic warning. The foundation of every vice is merely showing indifference to it. A big reason for the Quraysh's animosity to the warning of the Prophet (sws) was that they neither believed in the Day of Judgement nor wanted to believe in it. In the first place, they regarded it to be improbable and unlikely, and if they did believe in it to any extent, then they would argue that because they have been blessed with wealth and affluence in this world, on the Day of Judgement too they would be similarly blessed. Moreover, if the Almighty intended to punish them, their deities would save them through their intercession. The verse thus warns them that the Day of Judgement which will be heralded by the sound of a trumpet will be very severe for them.

The words *عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ غَيْرُ يَسِيرٍ* say that though the disbelievers regard that day to be very for easy them, yet, on the contrary it will be stern and harsh for them.

This verse only states in a negative style what has been said earlier in a positive way and in this way is actually a very subtle sarcasm on the foolish attitude of the disbelievers: they regard it to be improbable and arrogantly express that they will reckon with it when it comes. These verses say that the day will not at all be an easy one to contend with; it will be very tough; hence, whatever is to be done for it, can only be done in this world. He who has lost this opportunity, will be seized forever and seized in such a manner that no one will be able to rescue him.

9. And show perseverance in the way of your Lord.

10. Thus, when the trumpet is sounded, that Day will be very severe. It will not be easy for the disbelievers.

ذَرْنِي وَمَنْ خَلَقْتُ وَحِيدًا (١١) وَجَعَلْتُ لَهُ مَالًا مَمْدُودًا (١٢) وَبَنِينَ شُهُودًا (١٣)
وَمَهَّدْتُ لَهُ تَمْهِيدًا (١٤) ثُمَّ يَطْمَعُ أَنْ أَزِيدَ (١٥)¹¹

These verses admonish the megalomaniac leaders of Makkah and Tā'if. They regarded their affluence to be a sign of correctness of their beliefs and deeds and of they being God's favourites. They would thus contend that even if there was going to be a Day of Judgement there was no danger for them of which they are being warned, and would in fact be blessed with much much more. The Almighty has directed the Prophet (sws) to leave the matter of such people to Him and He is sufficient to deal with them alone. The Prophet (sws) should not be worried about them.

The style ذَرْنِي وَمَنْ خَلَقْتُ وَحِيدًا of the verse is very similar to (and leave the matter of these rejecters who enjoy the comforts of life to Me and give them a little respite, (73:11)) mentioned in the previous *sūrah*. I have explained it there.

The expression خَلَقْتُ وَحِيدًا refers to the fact that when man comes into this world, he is without wealth and status and without comrades and confidants. He receives these things only because of God's special favour, and they remain with him as long as the Almighty wishes them to. His obligation towards this favour is that he should become very grateful to God. This favour should not make him arrogantly believe that he is God's favourite and that if ever there is going to be a Day of Judgement, he will receive even more of God's blessings. At another place, this subject is mentioned in the following words: وَلَقَدْ جِئْتُمُونَا فُرَادَى كَمَا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ (٩٤:٦) (and now you have returned to Us alone, as We created you the first time, (6:94)). In other words, the verse is directing the Prophet (sws) to leave such an arrogant and grandiose person to the Almighty; he came into this world alone and when the Almighty gave him wealth and status he became conceited, and now that he is being told to fear the Hereafter, he becomes even more conceited by saying that he will receive even more blessings of God in the Hereafter.

Here the question arises whether the verse is referring to a particular person or is it referring to the mentality of the generally affluent people of Makkah and Tā'if. Exegetes are of the opinion that the reference is to Walīd ibn Mughīrah, a leader of the Quraysh. In my opinion there is no reason for restricting the verse to him. The mentality depicted here is not

11. Leave to Me whom I have created alone and bestowed abundant wealth and sons abiding in his presence and well smoothed out for him the way. Still he expects that I shall give him more.

just that of Walīd ibn Mughīrah; it is that of all the leaders and affluent people of the Quraysh. And such is the universal nature of this trait that most people who are rich and also have a high status end up with this despicable mentality. Very few people are able to protect themselves from this contagious disease. Thus it would not be proper to believe that these verses have been revealed with regard to Walīd ibn Mughīrah. Of course the mentality and character they depict also apply to him. I have already explained in the introduction to this *tafsīr* that when our early scholars say that a particular verse has been revealed with regard to a specific person, they do not necessarily imply that the verse was revealed because of that person; at times, they intend to refer to just one application of the verse. The subject discussed here is raised at many other places as well, and at all such places the purpose of the Qur'ān is to point out the common mentality of the arrogant people and not to some specific person.

It should also be kept in consideration that the word مَنْ used here which is used for both singular and plural entities, and both types of antecedents can be used for it.

The sentence *وَجَعَلْتُ لَهُ مَالًا مَمْدُودًا* refers to the fact that when he came into this world, he was without any wealth or children; he came without any resources nor with helpers or supporters. It was purely a favour of God that He gave him assets which were spread out. This means that at some places he had orchards, at others houses; similarly, if one area housed his sheep and cattle, others boasted his agricultural lands, business ventures and shops. The capitalists of these times have bank accounts in every country and investments in companies found all over the world; they must also be counted among the category of “spread out wealth”.

The expression *وَوَيْنِينَ شُهَدَاءَ* refers to the fact that not only the Almighty blessed him with wealth, he also blessed him with sons who were his supporters in every place and front, and who were there to help his widely scattered business ventures. It needs to be appreciated that in a tribal system, the support and help of a family has always occupied a great status. On this depended the survival and defence of a tribe. The person who had the most sons and family members would be made the leader of a tribe, and the sons too had to be so capable and alert that they could stand by the side of their father whenever any need arose.

The words *وَمَهْدُتٌ لَهُ تَمْهِيدًا* refer to the fact that by blessing him with wealth and sons the path of attaining respect and dignity, leadership and say in the society was paved for him.

The verse *ثُمَّ يَظْمَعُ أَنْ أَرِيدَ* implies that the obligation of divine favours bestowed on him was that he be a grateful and obedient person to his Lord. On the contrary, after receiving these divine favours, he became

arrogant and haughty. When he would be warned that a day is to come which will be very severe on the ungrateful and the disbelievers, he would claim that if ever such a day will come he will receive even more favours than he has received here.

كَلَّا إِنَّهُ كَانَ لِآيَاتِنَا عَنِيدًا (١٦)¹²

This verse is an emphatic negation of the false claim of such megalomaniacs. Their dream is going to be shattered. The favours bestowed on them by the Almighty were neither because they were entitled to them nor because they had earned them through their own planning; they were given to them purely as a blessing of the Almighty to test whether they remain grateful and obedient to Him or become rebellious to Him and show arrogance and spread disorder in the land. It became evident from this test that they became the enemies of God after receiving these favours. The word “verses” here refer to the verses of the Qur’ān in general and in particular those who warn them of the worldly punishment and the one they will face in the next world and are ones which inform them that in this world it is only the Almighty who runs its affairs and in the next also, only He will be running the affairs as the supreme Lord.

سَأُرْهِقُهُ صَعُودًا (١٧)¹³

The word إِرْهَاقٌ means “to put someone through hardship” and صَعُودٌ refers to a peak or a steep slope which is very difficult to climb.

The verse actually mentions the punishment for showing ingratitude to the favours spelled out in the verse وَمَهَّدْتُ لَهُ تَمْهِيدًا above. After receiving favours, they started to cherish and worship these favours forgetting the Being Who had given them these favours and started to worship their own desires. Such was the extent of this worship that they could not find in themselves the courage to fight any of their desires. For this reason, they will be made to climb a mounting slope in the Hereafter.

Here one needs to keep in mind the nature of virtue and vice: the Almighty has given man an awareness of the two; at the same time, He has put him through a test that the pleasures of vice are immediate and its pangs have been deferred to the Hereafter; on the other hand, hardships are encountered immediately when a person treads the path of virtue and its benefits are deferred. The result is that when a person adopts the path of virtue, his inner desires oppose him at every step and make him climb steep slopes, and if he adopts the path of vice, then he does gain

12. Certainly not! He has turned out to be an enemy of Our revelations.

13. Soon I will make him climb a mounting slope.

immediate pleasures and he thinks that the punishment of this vice is far-fetched. Because of this attraction, the majority adopts this path. Only those people have the courage to adopt the path of virtue who have perseverance and fortitude in them and to inculcate these qualities a person has to really work hard. While pointing to this very aspect Jesus (sws) is reported to have said: "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few." (Matthew, 7:13-14)

In Sūrah Balad, the words used are:

وَهَدَيْنَاهُ النَّجْدَيْنِ فَلَا افْتَحَمَ الْعَقَبَةَ وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا الْعَقَبَةُ فَكُ رَقَبَةً أَوْ إِطْعَامٌ فِي يَوْمٍ ذِي مَسْغَبَةٍ يَتِيمًا ذَا مَقْرَبَةٍ أَوْ مَسْكِينًا ذَا مَتْرَبَةٍ ثُمَّ كَانَ مِنَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالْمَرْحَمَةِ أُولَئِكَ أَصْحَابُ الْمَيْمَنَةِ وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِآيَاتِنَا هُمْ أَصْحَابُ الْمَشْأَمَةِ عَلَيْهِمْ نَارٌ مُوصَدَةٌ (٩٠: ١٠-٢٠)

And We have shown man the two ways that lead to good and evil. But he did not surmount the steep path. And what have you understood what this steep path is? Freeing of a slave or feeding, in days of famine, of an orphan near of kin or an indigent [down] in the dust – then he be of those who accepted faith and who counselled one another to be patient and sympathetic. (90: 10-20)

The Qur'an regards only those people to be worthy of success in the Hereafter who have the courage to surmount the steep path of virtue in this world. Those who will not show the courage to surmount it in this world will have to face the steep path of Hell. They will be forced to cross it but they will not be able to do so.

إِنَّهُ فَكَّرَ وَقَدَّرَ (١٨) فَقَتَلَ كَيْفَ قَدَّرَ (١٩) ثُمَّ قَتَلَ كَيْفَ قَدَّرَ (٢٠) ثُمَّ نَظَرَ (٢١) ثُمَّ عَبَسَ وَبَسَرَ (٢٢) ثُمَّ أَدْبَرَ وَاسْتَكْبَرَ (٢٣) فَقَالَ إِنْ هَذَا إِلَّا سِحْرٌ يُؤْتَرُ (٢٤) إِنْ هَذَا إِلَّا قَوْلُ الْبَشَرِ (٢٥)¹⁴

It is said in verse sixteen: "he has turned out to be an enemy of Our

14. He pondered and schemed. Cursed be he; what he schemed! Then cursed be he, what a wrong scheme he made. Then he looked about. Then he frowned and made a face. Then he turned away and became arrogant. Then said: "This is nothing but a magic which is being handed down from the past! It is nothing but the word of man!"

revelations.” Depicted in these verses is a picture of this animosity, and if one deeply deliberates on these verses, one will conclude that it is a very comprehensive picture.

The words *إِنَّهُ فَكَّرَ وَقَدَّرَ* imply that when the Qur’ān was recited to him, instead of showing his reaction immediately, he took some time to ponder so that the onlookers would think that their leader was taking the matter seriously and would express his opinion after pondering over it. The word *وَقَدَّرَ* means that after pondering over the matter, he thoroughly weighed the opinion that came to his mind so that what he uttered would find roots in the hearts of people, and everyone would vouch for the veracity of the opinion expressed.

He is cursed twice in the verses *فَقَتِلَ كَيْفَ قَدَّرَ ثُمَّ قُتِلَ كَيْفَ قَدَّرَ* even before his opinion is expressed. The reason for this emphatic disapproval is not only to express the hideous nature of his opinion, but also to make the listeners aware of how foolishly a person talks when he has lost his senses; he tries to convince people that a pebble is a pearl and thinks that there is no one as intellectually gifted as him.

The verses *ثُمَّ نَظَرَ ثُمَّ عَبَسَ وَبَسَرَ ثُمَّ أَدْبَرَ وَاسْتَكْبَرَ* portray the arrogant style he adopted while expressing his opinion. A little deliberation will show that such is the graphic nature of this portrayal by the Qur’ān that even if his opinion is not expressed, a connoisseur of such a style will easily understand what opinion this style reflects. First, in a state of deep reflection, he lifted his face assessing the faces of the people in order to judge their moods and see whether it was the right time to express his opinion. He then frowned and made a face so that those who saw him came to know merely through his demeanour that he had formed a very hopeless opinion about the Book of God. He then very arrogantly turned away muttering some words under his breath.

Although there was no further need for any detail after the above mentioned portrayal since his style and demeanour were enough to reveal his opinion, the Qur’ān has still gone on to cite the venomous words he said while arrogantly walking away *قَالَ إِنَّ هَذَا إِلَّا سِحْرٌ يُؤْتَرُ إِنَّ هَذَا إِلَّا قَوْلُ الْبَشَرِ* (he said that the Qur’ān is mere sorcery and magic and that it is only a human discourse).

I have pointed many times in this *tafsīr* to the reason on account of which the Quraysh often called the Qur’ān to be magic: when it no longer was possible for them to deny its miraculous eloquence and its potent influence, they embarked upon a propaganda campaign against it and started calling it magic so that the common masses were led to believe that it was not divine and that they need not be overawed by it in this regard. Thus by calling it magic they wanted to make people believe

that the reason for its tremendous efficacy was not that it was divine but that it was mere magic of words and that it was not something unique so as to have come into creation for the first time and be specific to the Qur'ān only. It was something which existed from previous times. The implication is that many orators and poets lived in their country whose works had this magic; however, no one regarded them to be messengers of God and nor did they themselves claim to be so and nor did anyone regard their work to be of divine origin, so what then was the characteristic of this discourse that it be regarded divine.

The verse *إِنْ هَذَا إِلَّا قَوْلُ الْبَشَرِ* says that this is merely a human discourse. It may hold its audience spellbound but should not be elevated to the divine.

¹⁵ سَأُصْلِيهِ سَقَرَ (٢٦) وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا سَقَرُ (٢٧) لَا تُبْقِي وَلَا تَذَرُ (٢٨)

Portrayed in these verses is the fate of such an arrogant person. The verse *وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا سَقَرُ* is an expression of the horrific nature of Hell. It should not be regarded as something ordinary. Its horror cannot be judged in this world. Only those will have an idea of it who encounter it. Unfortunate is he who spends his life in indifference to it. It needs to be noted that such an address is general in nature and there is no reason to regard it to be directed at the Prophet (sws).

Consider next the verse: *لَا تُبْقِي وَلَا تَذَرُ*. The phrase *أُبْقَى عَلَيْهِ* means “to show mercy and clemency.” Though the preposition is not mentioned here and neither is there any occasion for its mention, however the verb is used here in this very meaning. The implication is that such will be the horrific and oppressive nature of Hell that it will neither show the slightest of mercy to anyone by reducing its agony for its dwellers nor will it ignore anyone allowing that person to go free. In other words, one should neither expect mercy from it nor being ignored by it. It will be ruthless to the ultimate extent and also fully vigilant.

¹⁶ لَوَاحَهُ لِلْبَشَرِ (٢٩)

The word *بَشَر* refers to the body-skin. Such will be the reach of the flames of the fire of Hell that the skin of the criminals will start to burn even from a distance. In Sūrah Ma'ārij, the words used are: *نَزَاعَةً لِّلنَّوَى* (١٦:٧٠). Depicted here are the effects of the intensity of heat caused by Hell-fire which will begin even before the criminals enter Hell. The

15. I will soon cast him into Hell. And what have you understood what Hell is? It will neither show mercy nor spare anyone.

16. It scorches the skin.

purpose is to inform them that the climax of the torment whose commencement is so intense can only be imagined.

عَلَيْهَا تِسْعَةَ عَشَرَ (٣٠)¹⁷

Here the noun qualified by the number nineteen is not mentioned; however, the succeeding verse tells us that this number refers to angels. Their veiled reference in this verse shows that their temperament, appearance and powers will be absolutely harmonious with their nature of duty. By merely seeing them, criminals will be able to evaluate that they will not show the slightest mercy to anyone nor is there any possibility of being liberated from their grasp.

Here it is possible that a question may arise in someone's mind regarding the number of angels guarding Hell. What is the wisdom in their number being nineteen. Also, why has the Qur'ān so emphatically enumerated them even if they were nineteen. The Qur'ān itself has answered this question in the next verse; however, before this answer is discussed an essential point should be understood as a prelude.

As far as the Hereafter is concerned, its arguments are found in human intellect and human nature as well as the world inside man and the one that lies outside him. The Qur'ān has delineated all these arguments in detail. As far as the details of Paradise and Hell are concerned, they are of the category of the *mutashābihāt* whose actual form and reality are only known to God. He has tried to communicate them to us through similes and parables. Through this we can have a general idea of them; however, we cannot grasp their true form. If a person insists on finding out their true form he will go astray and instead of benefiting from this information, he will reject the reality which is based on absolute arguments of sense and reason. In such matters, the right attitude that a person of intellect should adopt is to believe in whatever the Almighty has told him and have faith in the fact that the true form of such things will become apparent when they will actually manifest themselves one day. The Qur'ān has explained this aspect thus in Sūrah Āl-i-Imrān:

هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ مِنْهُ آيَاتٌ مُحْكَمَاتٌ هُنَّ أُمُّ الْكِتَابِ وَأُخَرُ مُتَشَابِهَاتٌ
فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ زَيْغٌ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ مَا تَشَابَهَ مِنْهُ ابْتِغَاءَ الْفِتْنَةِ وَابْتِغَاءَ تَأْوِيلِهِ وَمَا
يَعْلَمُ تَأْوِيلَهُ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَالرَّاسِخُونَ فِي الْعِلْمِ يَقُولُونَ آمَنَّا بِهِ كُلٌّ مِّنْ عِندِ رَبِّنَا (٣: ٧)

It is He who has revealed to you the Book. In it are verses *muhkam*

17. Over it are nineteen angels.

[based on argument of sense and reason] – they are the foundation of the Book – and others *mutashābih* [in which facts are portrayed in symbolic form]. Then those whose hearts are warped always go after the *mutashābih* among them in order to create dissension and in order to know their reality even though no one except God knows their reality. As for those who are well-grounded in knowledge, they say: “We believe in these all. These *mutashābih* verses like the *muhkam* ones have been revealed from our Lord.” (3:7)

Such warped personalities always exist. Among the Quraysh and the People of the Book too such mischievous elements existed. So as soon as the Qur’ān mentioned nineteen angels, it also warned them forthwith (in the subsequent verses) that although people prone to mischief will use this information to spread mischief, the Almighty mentions such facts to increase the knowledge of true students and the contaminated nature of those who are prone to mischief is fully highlighted. With this background, readers may now read the subsequent verses.

وَمَا جَعَلْنَا أَصْحَابَ النَّارِ إِلَّا مَلَائِكَةً وَمَا جَعَلْنَا عِدَّتَهُمْ إِلَّا فِتْنَةً لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لِيَسْتَيَقِنَ
الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ وَيَزْدَادَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِيمَانًا وَلَا يَرْتَابَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ
وَلِيَقُولَ الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ مَرَضٌ وَالْكَافِرُونَ مَاذَا أَرَادَ اللَّهُ بِهَذَا مَثَلًا كَذَلِكَ يُضِلُّ اللَّهُ مَن
يَشَاءُ وَيَهْدِي مَن يَشَاءُ وَمَا يَعْلَمُ جُنُودَ رَبِّكَ إِلَّا هُوَ وَمَا هِيَ إِلَّا ذِكْرَى لِلْبَشَرِ (٣١)¹⁸

This verse, as indicated earlier, is an immediate warning. It is not true that this verse was revealed much later in Madīnah. The copulative particle *waw* shows that it is connected to the previous verse and revealed together with it. Verses which are revealed later and placed with verses revealed earlier are not so closely connected and are independent in nature. One example of this is verse twenty of Sūrah Muzzammil which was revealed in Madīnah. Its independent nature from the previous verses is evident. It does not begin with a copulative particle the

18. -- And We have appointed none but angels as the keepers of Hell and have mentioned their number only to make it a test for those who have disbelieved. So that the People of the Book receive assurance from this and the believers may increase in their faith and that the People of the Book and the believers have no doubt about it. And so that those who have an ailment in their hearts and those who have disbelieved say: “What can God mean by this mention?” In this way, God leads astray whom He pleases and guides whom He pleases. And no one knows the armies of your Lord except He. And this matter is just a reminder for man.

way the verse under discussion does. Here it is evident that it was revealed together with the previous verses, and the purpose was to make the Prophet (sws) aware of the mentality of the mischievous people in a broad manner. He is told that when these people hear such things from him, they will make fun of them; however, the Prophet (sws) must not pay any attention to their arrogant talk; the Almighty mentions such facts to increase the knowledge of the believers and to highlight the corrupted mentality of the mischievous.

The section of the verse وَمَا جَعَلْنَا أَصْحَابَ النَّارِ إِلَّا مَلَائِكَةً وَمَا جَعَلْنَا عِدَّتَهُمْ إِلَّا فِتْنَةً لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا implies that just as the Almighty has appointed angels and not the jinn and devils to conduct all the affairs of this universe, similarly he has appointed the angels over Hell. No other creature has been appointed for this task. This further implies that all the affairs of the Almighty are managed by angels who are His pure and noble creation. This is to safeguard the fact that His will is implemented in the manner He wants to and there is not the slightest deviation in this regard. Thus angels are deputed as the keepers of Hell.

Found in this sentence is also the answer to mischief-mongers who could have said that when together with the criminals, the angels will also be in Hell what is there to fear? The implication is that if they want, they can indulge in such arrogant talk, but they should remember that there is a world of difference between the inmates of a prison and its guards; they will get to know this difference when they encounter the angels deputed in the prison of Hell.

The expression وَمَا جَعَلْنَا عِدَّتَهُمْ إِلَّا فِتْنَةً لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا alludes to the wisdom behind the number of angels: this number is mentioned so that it becomes a means of trial for the disbelievers of the Day of Judgement and it presents them with an opportunity to say whatever they want to against it. It needs to be appreciated that the Almighty has placed trials in every sphere of life through which the hidden vices of the wrong-doers and the concealed virtues of the righteous come to light. In the absence of these trials, neither can the hidden potentials of a person come to the foreground nor can the evil and righteous people be distinguished from one another. Consequently, while mentioning Paradise and Hell, the Almighty has also stated some facts which became a means of trial for the disbelievers. For example, the observations stated by the Prophet (sws) in his divine journey to the heavens or the Qur'ān's mention of the tree of *zaqqūm* in Hell. By referring to them, the opponents made fun of the Prophet (sws) as well as of Paradise and Hell. In Sūrah Banī Isrā'īl, it is said:

وَمَا جَعَلْنَا الرُّؤْيَا الَّتِي أَرَيْنَاكَ إِلَّا فِتْنَةً لِلنَّاسِ وَالشَّجَرَةَ الْمَلْعُونَةَ فِي الْقُرْآنِ (٦٠:١٧)

We have made the vision which We showed you, as well as the tree cursed in the Qur'ān a trial for the opponents. (17:60)

The Almighty has explained at various places in the Qur'ān the wisdom behind giving opportunity to devils among the jinn and men in creating mischief against the truth. In Sūrah Hajj, it is stated:

لِيَجْعَلَ مَا يُنْقِي الشَّيْطَانُ فِتْنَةً لِلَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِم مَّرَضٌ وَالْقَاسِيَةِ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَإِنَّ الظَّالِمِينَ لَفِي شِقَاقٍ بَعِيدٍ وَلِيَعْلَمَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكَ (٢٢: ٥٣-٥٤)

God gives this chance so that what the devils say against the truth becomes a trial for those in whose hearts there is an ailment or whose hearts are hardened. And these wrongdoers are occupied in a long confrontation so that those who are endowed with knowledge may realize that this is the truth from your Lord. (22:53-54)

I have discussed this subject in detail in the *tafsīr* of the above quoted verse of Sūrah Hajj. It can be looked up for details.

Similarly, when it was said in this verse that nineteen angels will be the guards of Hell, it was also stated that though the wicked will make this a means of stirring mischief yet in accordance with the law of God this trial is necessary; it is through this trial that the evil found in people with corrupt hearts will be exposed; similarly, through this trial, the faith and knowledge of people who are searching for the truth will be strengthened. Consequently, it is mentioned in some narratives that when the arrogant among the Quraysh heard that only nineteen angels are deputed over Hell, they said if this was their number then there was nothing to fear of and that they would easily be able to overpower them; someone boasted that he alone was enough for a certain number and that one of his comrades would be enough to deal with the rest.

In the sentence: لِيَسْتَيْقِنَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ وَيَزْدَادَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِيمَانًا the particle ل (lā) is meant to express the consequence: the consequence of this struggle between good and evil is that the conviction of the true People of the Book will be augmented, and the faith of those who have embraced faith will be strengthened.

Contextual indication shows that the expression أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ refers to sincere People of the Book. Those among them who really believed in their books had no pretext to make fun of such statements of the Qur'ān because similar statements were found in their own books. When they saw such statements in the Qur'ān also their belief was reinforced. It was

these People of the Book who later embraced Islam.

The reason why the faith of the believers is reinforced is because whatever is said against it comes before them and they are able to fully evaluate that the objections of the opponents carry no weight. Opposites are recognized by opposites. If a person adopts one aspect of a thing once both aspects are evident to him, then he does so on the basis of his intellect. If he accepts the aspect of faith, then his faith is not blind; it is based on understanding. He accepts it with full conviction and every trial increases his faith. The faith of people who blindly believe has no roots and for this reason at times even a slight adverse wind is enough to shake it.

The sentence وَلَا يَرْتَابَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ states in a negative sense what is stated above in a positive manner. The reason that the Almighty puts people through such trials is that the true People of the Book and the believers are secured from the onslaughts of doubt. In other words, this is an anticipatory precautionary measure to protect a person from doubts.

Here it should be kept in consideration that the sincere People of the Book are also mentioned adjacent to the believers even though this *sūrah*, as alluded to earlier, is from among the early Makkan *sūrahs* when Muslims had yet to directly encounter the People of the Book. Consequently, this is one of the reasons due to which some people have regarded this *sūrah* to be Madīnan. However, in my opinion this view is not correct. The sincere among the People of the Book were counted as Muslims and for this very reason the Almighty from the very beginning has mentioned them as the vanguard of the believers. The reason for this mention was that it should become evident to them from the very first day the role they were required to play viz a viz the new prophet, what their status was in the eyes of God, what circumstances awaited them, the measures which the Almighty was taking to strengthen their faith and how they should remain vigilant to make use of them.

In the sentence وَلَيَقُولَ الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ مَرَضٌ وَالْكَافِرُونَ مَاذَا أَرَادَ اللَّهُ بِهَذَا مَثَلًا the effect these *mutashābihāt* would produce on the jealous Jews and the die-hard disbelievers is expressed.

People have generally taken الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ مَرَضٌ to refer to the Hypocrites. They contend that the word مَرَضٌ (disease) mentioned in the Qur'ān always refers to hypocrisy. This, however, is not correct. I have explained at a number of places in this *tafsīr* that this word also refers to jealousy and envy, and on such occasions it refers to the Jews because they were jealous of the Ishmaelites as well as of the Prophet (sws). The details of this jealousy are mentioned in Sūrah Baqarah. Earlier, the sincere People of the Book were mentioned; here, in contrast, the jealous

Jews are mentioned and simultaneously the word الْكَافِرُونَ refers to the disbelievers among the Quraysh signifying the fact that both factions will adopt the same attitude about the *mutashābihāt*. They will exclaim: مَاذَا أَرَادَ اللَّهُ بِهِذَا مَثَلًا (what can God mean by this mention?)

I have already explained what they mean by this statement under verse twenty six of Sūrah Baqarah: After hearing such a thing from the *mutashābihāt*, they will make a face and arrogantly object at the reason for God stating such parables. In other words, what they wanted to say was that these were nonsensical things and the Almighty does not say such nonsensical things; the person who is ascribing such things to Him is, God forbid, nonsensical too and his claim to prophethood is absolutely false.

The implication of the sentence كَذَلِكَ يُضِلُّ اللَّهُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ is that by putting people through such trials and tests the Almighty leads astray whomsoever among them He wants and guides whomsoever He wants. Here one should keep in mind what has been explained in this *tafsīr* many times: Every wish and intention of God is governed by His wisdom. He leads only those people astray whom He finds worthy of this treatment and those who are worthy of being guided as per His law are guided by Him. The following verse of Sūrah Baqarah has precisely the same context:

فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا فَيَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ وَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فَيَقُولُونَ مَاذَا أَرَادَ اللَّهُ بِهِذَا مَثَلًا يُضِلُّ بِهِ كَثِيرًا وَيَهْدِي بِهِ كَثِيرًا وَمَا يُضِلُّ بِهِ إِلَّا الْفَاسِقِينَ (٢: ٢٦)

Then those who accept faith know that it is a truth from their Lord; as for those who disbelieved, they will say: “What does Allah mean by this similitude?” God misleads many by it, and many He leads into the right path; and in reality He misleads by it only those who are disobedient. (2:26)

The sentence وَمَا يَعْلَمُ جُنُودَ رَبِّكَ إِلَّا هُوَ is a scathing criticism on the claim of these criticizers to knowing everything. They should not think that they have knowledge of all the secrets of the universe. This is an absolutely false claim. No one except the Almighty knows about His armies. Only He knows their size and the capability of each of His army units and the nature of weapons with which each regiment is equipped and the identity and number of soldiers at a particular front. Neither does any person have all this knowledge nor can he have such knowledge. In whatever amount the Almighty makes His creatures aware of the secrets of this universe should be honoured and valued by them and regarded by

them to be an invaluable addition to their treasure of knowledge. They should not conceitedly think that the universe is just what they are able to see.

It needs to be kept in consideration that in these times also our pseudo-intellectuals who have raised objections against the Qur'ān or interpreted it according to their whims have done so by arrogantly regarding themselves to be know-alls. They either rejected what their limited intellect could not understand, and if they could not muster the courage to do so, they tried to interpret it in such a manner which took them even way beyond rejecting such things.

The sentence وَمَا هِيَ إِلَّا ذِكْرَى لِلْبَشَرِ spells out the purpose of the verses which depict the circumstances of the Hereafter: these warning-laden verses are not meant for criticism; they are meant to remind and admonish people so that those who want to protect themselves from this eternal torment are able to prepare for this. The Almighty has informed them of this danger by reminding them of it. It is up to people to benefit from this. Those who will not benefit from it will have no excuse left before the Almighty. The practice and law of God of providing guidance to His creatures is that He informs them of virtue and vice. It is against His law to forcibly make them adopt the path of virtue.

Our exegetes have generally regarded the antecedent of the pronoun هِيَ to be سَقَر (Hell). In my opinion, however, it refers to the verses in which Hell and its punishments are depicted. The reason I hold this view is that it is these verses which hold the status of ذِكْرَى (reminder) and not سَقَر.

كَلَّا وَالْقَمَرَ (٣٢) وَاللَّيْلَ إِذَا أَدْبَرَ (٣٣) وَالصُّبْحَ إِذَا أَصْفَرَ (٣٤)¹⁹

In these verses, oaths are sworn by various manifestations of nature and stressed that the Hereafter and Hell, of which people are being informed, are among the great certainties of this universe. They are sure to come; however, since every work of the Almighty is gradual in nature, they will come at the time appointed for them; they cannot come before that time. It is foolish to surmise that they will never come if they have not come as yet. If one wants to get rid of the night soon and wants the day to rise earlier than its appointed time, then this haste will not be successful in its aim. Similar is the case of the Day of Judgement. A time has been appointed for it. It will come precisely at that time.

First of all, an oath is sworn by the moon in كَلَّا وَالْقَمَرَ. The particle of negation كَلَّا (certainly not) before it is meant to strongly negate the view

19. Certainly not! The moon bears witness and the night also when it turns its back and the morning when it shines forth.

of the addressees. Examples of such negation are found in various Qur'ānic oaths mentioned in the previous *sūrahs*. On such occasions, the speaker wants to immediately negate a view of the addressees and does not even want to first cite the reason for this negation and then express negation. The intensity of dislike of this view is so strong that he begins by this negation and then through the oath itself expresses the reason for this.

I have explained at various instances that such oaths mentioned in the Qur'ān are meant to substantiate a claim which is generally stated after the oath. Here the addressees are the disbelievers of the Day of Judgement as is evident from the context, and their doubt under discussion is why the Day of Judgement is not coming if it is destined to come. The moon is cited before them as an example. They are told that just as the moon slowly and gradually becomes full, in a similar manner, they too shall gradually reach the place they are being informed of, and then witness the manifestation of the perfect justice of their Lord. Just as the moon passes through various phases in its journey,²⁰ and it must pass through them before it reaches its culmination however much a person may show haste for this, similarly, the Day of Judgement will come after various phases pass. It will not come unless these phases pass.

Every change which comes in this universe comes in accordance with the scheme devised by the Almighty. No one's desire or haste can intervene in it. This day will definitely come and without its advent the very objective of this universe will not stand fulfilled. However, it will come in accordance with the exact time appointed for it by the Almighty.

The Almighty has substantiated various facts of religion through the waxing and waning, and rising and setting of the moon. I have explained these at various places in this *tafsīr*. In the coming *sūrahs* too, some important aspects follow in this regard. I shall *inshallāh* explain them at these places. Here in this verse the gradual development found in the schemes of God is alluded to. The objective is to caution people who are demanding that the Day of Judgement should come soon. They are told that each of God's signs has a prescribed program. Only He knows its benefits and expediencies. What is an obvious requirement of His justice shall necessarily manifest itself; however, it will manifest at its appointed time. In Sūrah Inshiqāq also, an oath is sworn by the moon and there too precisely this very reality is referred to. It is said:

20. A verse says:

وَالْقَمَرَ قَدَرْنَا مَنَازِلَ (٣٩:٣٦)

And We have ordained phases for the moon. (36:39)

وَالْقَمَرَ إِذَا اتَّسَقَ لَتَرْكَبُنَّ طَبَقًا عَنْ طَبَقٍ (٨٤ : ١٨-١٩)

And the moon bears witness when it grows full that you shall certainly ascend gradually. (84: 18-19)

In other words, man shall definitely come into the presence of God for accountability; however, just as the sun gradually reaches its bloom, this day too will appear after various stages pass.

After the moon, in the verses oaths are sworn by the night and day: كَلَّا وَالْقَمَرَ وَاللَّيْلَ إِذَا أَدْبَرَ وَالصُّبْحَ إِذَا أَصْفَرَ. The night bears witness when it turns its back and the morning bears witness when it shines forth. The implication is that just as there is no sign of the morning in the darkness of night but a time comes when the morning arrives, similar will be the case with the Day of Judgement. This world is like the night whose darkness enwraps the morning of the Day of Judgement. However, as soon as the time arrives, this blanket of darkness will disappear and the Day of Judgement will arrive. The Almighty, who each day brings forth the light of the day after the night and no one is surprised by this great transformation, similarly, will bring forth the Day of Judgment whenever He wants to and at a time when everyone will see that what they regarded to be impossible has manifested itself.

The same oath, with a slight difference in words, is stated in Sūrah Takwīr to substantiate the Day of Judgement:

وَاللَّيْلَ إِذَا عَسْعَسَ وَالصُّبْحَ إِذَا تَنَفَّسَ (٨١ : ١٧-١٨)

And the night bears witness as it retreats and the dawn when it breathes. (81:17-18)

I have explained at a number of places in this *tafsīr* that the Almighty has created this universe in such a manner that at some place or the other a continuous rehearsal of the Day of Judgement is going on. The objective is to provide man from his very surroundings the corroboration of such a day in case he has doubts about it. For a sincere person who is searching for the truth, such evidence is enough to convince him.

إِنَّهَا لِأَحَدَى الْكُبَرِ (٣٥) نَذِيرًا لِلْبَشَرِ (٣٦)²¹

These verses are the complement (*muqṣam bihi*) of the oaths mentioned in the previous verses: these verses of the Qur'ān which have been revealed to inform people of the horrors of Hell are no jest. They depict a

21. That this matter is from among the great matters narrated to warn man.

great upheaval which is going to take place. Unfortunate are the people who, instead of learning a lesson from them, are making fun of them.

لِمَنْ شَاءَ مِنْكُمْ أَنْ يَتَقَدَّمَ أَوْ يَتَأَخَّرَ (٣٧)²²

The implication of this verse is that it was essential to inform people of that dreadful Day before its arrival. This was essential so that they were not left with any excuse of not being informed and thus not prepared for it. Consequently, through His Book the Almighty has revealed the truth to such an extent that people are not left with any excuse to deny it. Whether they accept it or not, is left to them to decide; he who wants to encounter a good fate will come forward to accept it and he who is calling for his doom will show arrogance and turn away from it.

كُلُّ نَفْسٍ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ رَهِينَةٌ (٣٨)²³

The implication of this verse is that just as effects are tied to their causes, souls are tied to their deeds. On the Day of Judgement, only deeds will liberate a person or annihilate him. If someone arrogantly thinks that he will be able to save himself from the torments of the Day because of his high status and pedigree and through his deities and their intercession, then he should remember that none of these will be of any avail to him.

إِلَّا أَصْحَابَ الْيَمِينِ (٣٩) فِي جَنَّاتٍ يَتَسَاءَلُونَ (٤٠) عَنِ الْمُجْرِمِينَ (٤١)²⁴

On that Day, only the People of the Right Hand will succeed. I have already explained who they are at some place in this *tafsīr*. They are people who spent this life while keeping in consideration the life to come and whose accounts shall be handed over to them in their right hands. This verse says that not only will they be rewarded commensurate with their deeds, they will be blessed with even more reward as a favour by the Almighty.

The nature of the question and answer mentioned in these verses becomes very evident from the following verse of Sūrah S@āffāt; they will also find an opportunity during the course of this conversation to address the companions of Hell and find out from them the reason which led them to this abode:

22. For every person among you who wants to advance forward or wants to turn away.

23. Every soul shall be held in pledge for its own deeds.

24. The only exception will be the people of the right hand. They will be in gardens inquiring after the wrongdoers.

فَأَقْبَلَ بَعْضُهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ يَتَسَاءَلُونَ قَالِ قَائِلٌ مِّنْهُمْ إِنِّي كَانَ لِي قَرِينٌ يَقُولُ أَأُنْثَكَ
لَمِنَ الْمُصَدِّقِينَ أَإِذَا مِتْنَا وَكُنَّا تُرَابًا وَعِظَامًا أَأَنْتَا لَمَدِينُونَ قَالَ هَلْ أَنْتُمْ مُّطْلَعُونَ
فَاطْلَعَ فَرَأَاهُ فِي سَوَاءِ الْجَحِيمِ (٣٧: ٥٠-٥٥)

The companions of Paradise will turn to each other while posing questions to each other. One will say: "I had a friend who used to say: 'Are you also among those who attest to the Day of Judgement? When we are dead and turned to dust and bones, shall we ever be brought to judgement?'" They will say: 'Go and take a peep.' He will look down and see his friend in the very midst of Hell. (37:50-55)

مَا سَلَكَكُمْ فِي سَقَرٍ (٤٢)²⁵

This question shall be posed to the companions of Hell by the companions of Paradise while the latter will be questioning each other about the fate of the former.

قَالُوا لَمْ نَكُ مِنَ الْمُصَلِّينَ (٤٣) وَلَمْ نَكُ نُطْعِمِ الْمِسْكِينَ (٤٤) وَكُنَّا نَخُوضُ مَعَ
الْحَائِضِينَ (٤٥) وَكُنَّا نُكَذِّبُ بِيَوْمِ الدِّينِ (٤٦) حَتَّى أَتَانَا الْيَقِينُ (٤٧)²⁶

The companions of Hell will, in response, acknowledge that it is their misdeeds which had brought them to Hell and no one else is to blame for this fate.

The first of these misdeeds is that they were not among those who prayed. It needs to be kept in consideration that just as in beliefs the belief of monotheism occupies primary importance, similarly, in deeds the prayer occupies primary importance. All prophets called people to this deed the foremost and informed them that adhering to it or rejecting it distinguishes believers from disbelievers.

The second misdeed that they will admit is their lack of spending in the way of God: they were not among those who fed the poor. After the prayer, spending in the way of God is the second most important deed of religion and upon these two pillars is built the edifice of all righteous deeds. I have alluded many times in this *tafsīr* to the fact that the prayer is instrumental in establishing a person's relationship with his Lord while

25. "What has brought you into Hell?"

26. They will reply: "We were not among those who prayed nor did we feed the poor and we used to quibble with these quibblers and used to deny this Day of Reckoning till there came to us this moment of certainty."

the *zakāh* is instrumental in establishing a person's relationship with his fellow human beings and on the institution of both these relationships depends one's relationship with one's religion.

After this, they will confess that they too indulged in frivolous and foolish talk regarding the Day of Judgement as others used to, and it was because of such frivolous talk that they denied this Day until death overcame them. Death brought them face to face with all the realities they doubted.

The verse *وَكُنَّا نَحُوزُ مَعَ الْخَائِضِينَ* refers to their statements as the ones alluded to above about the number of angels deputed over Hell.

The expression *خوز في الحديث* means "to raise trivial objections in something and in the process exceed limits and to make it a reason for creating mischief and deviation."

Consider next the expression: *حَتَّى أَتَانَا الْيَقِينُ*. The real meaning of the word *يَقِينُ* is "certainty"; however, since after death all post-death facts become evident to a person and he is forced to acknowledge their certainty, for this reason death is also called *يَقِينُ*. This is like referring to something by naming it after its consequence.

The confessions of the sinners which are cited here substantiate what is said in a preceding verse: *كُلُّ نَفْسٍ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ رَهِينَةٌ* (every soul shall be held in pledge for its own deeds). The objective is to open the eyes and ears of the foolish who on the bases of their creed and lineage and deities and their intercession were making fun of reward and punishment and through the very tongue of their friends and associates they are told that before the Almighty nothing except righteous deeds will be of any benefit for a person.

فَمَا تَنْفَعُهُمْ شَفَاعَةُ الشَّافِعِينَ (٤٨)²⁷

This is a negation of their self-claimed deities and their alleged intercession.

The style of the verse here is technically called *نفي الشيء بنفي لازمه* (negating a thing by negating its consequence). Imru' al-Qays while describing a desert-route has said *لَا يُهْتَدَى بِمَنَارِهِ* (its towers are not helpful in finding the way). This obviously means that it does not have any towers at all that help be sought from them. The Qur'an has unequivocally stated about the deities of the *mushrikūn* of Arabia whom they arrogantly counted on: *إِنْ هِيَ إِلَّا أَسْمَاءٌ سَمَّيْتُمُوهَا أَنْتُمْ وَآبَاؤُكُمْ مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ بِهَا مِنْ سُلْطَانٍ إِنْ يَتَّبِعُونَ إِلَّا الظَّنَّ* (٢٣:٥٣) (they are but names which you and your fathers have invented: God has vested no authority in them; they

27. So, no intercession of the intercessors will be of any use to them.

follow but vain conjectures, (53:23))

فَمَا لَهُمْ عَنِ التَّذْكِرَةِ مُعْرِضِينَ (٤٩)²⁸

This verse expresses wonder on the attitude of the disbelievers. They should have shown gratitude to the Almighty for being reminded in advance of the Day of reward and punishment. Not only this, they were even given a Book to inform them of the real facts of life and were also fortunate enough to be the addressees of a messenger of God. It is strange that instead of benefiting from this reminder they are showing aversion to it.

The word مُعْرِضِينَ is an accusative of state from the genitive pronoun in لَهُمْ. This is a very common style in Arabic. Many examples of this style can be seen in previous *sūrahs*.

كَأَنَّهُمْ خُمُرٌ مُسْتَنْفِرَةٌ (٥٠) فَرَّتْ مِنْ قَسْوَرَةٍ (٥١)²⁹

This is an example of their state of fear and anxiety. The word قَسْوَرَةٍ means “a lion”. When donkeys and zebras run after hearing the roar of a lion they seldom stop. At the slightest of sounds, they dart away as if a lion has actually come near them. This verse says that the state of affairs of these disbelievers is no different. They are so afraid of this reminder that they do not have the courage to listen to even a single word of it.

It should be kept in consideration that when something is so obvious that one's heart is not satisfied even after rejecting it and is also not ready to accept it, then this state of escapism and evasion is very similar to the example cited in this verse. Such people desire and also strive that their ears hear not a single word that may remind them of this reality.

بَلْ يُرِيدُ كُلُّ امْرِئٍ مِنْهُمْ أَنْ يُؤْتَى صُحُفًا مُنَشَّرَةً (٥٢)³⁰

The excuse which the disbelievers have fabricated to escape from this reminder is that why was such a book revealed to Muḥammad; why were not open scrolls handed to each one of them; surely this was not at all difficult for the Almighty. At another place, it is similarly said:

وَإِذَا جَاءَتْهُمْ آيَةٌ قَالُوا لَنْ نُؤْمِنَ حَتَّى نُؤْتَى مِثْلَ مَا أُوتِيَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ اللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ حَيْثُ

28. What then is the matter with them that they are turning away from the Reminder.

29. As though they are frightened asses fleeing from a lion?

30. In fact, each one of them desires that he be handed open scrolls.

يَجْعَلُ رِسَالَتَهُ (١٤٤:٦)

And when a sign is revealed to them they say: “We will not believe in it unless we are given that which God’s prophets have been given.” – God only knows best whom to entrust with His message. (6:124)

كَلَّا بَلْ لَا يَخَافُونَ الْآخِرَةَ (٥٣)³¹

The implication of this verse is that neither is this going to happen nor is there any need for it to happen. The reason for their evasion is not what they are expressing; the reason for it is that they do not expect the Day of Judgement to come. The word يَخَافُونَ here means يَرْجُونَ and this is a common meaning of it. I have already presented its examples in an earlier discussion. In other words, since they have no fear of the Hereafter and their heart’s desire is also to have no fear of it and that its fear should not spoil their luxurious lifestyle, so no sign can convince them. If according to their desire they are handed over open scrolls, even then they will come up with some other excuse.

كَلَّا إِنَّهُ تَذَكُّرٌ (٥٤) فَمَنْ شَاءَ ذَكِّرْهُ (٥٥)³²

These verses express indifference to these stubborn people and sound assurance to the Prophet (sws). The implication is that he should not bear the tantrums of such people. The Qur’ān is a reminder to them. It is up to them to benefit from it and adopt the right path. If they do not benefit from it, they will bear the consequences themselves. Whatever they do, they will not harm God or His Prophet. The practice of the Almighty is that before He seizes people He reminds them so that they are left with no excuse, and it is the responsibility of the Messenger to deliver this reminder to people. Neither is the Messenger responsible of forcibly making people accept guidance nor is it the law of the Almighty to force people who are averse to guidance to accept it.

وَمَا يَذْكُرُونَ إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ هُوَ أَهْلُ التَّقْوَىٰ وَأَهْلُ الْمَغْفِرَةِ (٥٦)³³

Stated in these verses is the law of God about providing guidance to people, and which has been discussed at many places in this *tafsīr*: He

31. Certainly not! They, in fact, have no fear of the Hereafter.

32. Certainly not! This is just a Reminder. So let him, who wills, take heed.

33. – and they do not take heed unless God so wills. He alone is pious and worthy of being forgiven.

guides only those people who use their faculties of sight, hearing and intellect and who honour the light of innate guidance and who reflect on the signs of God found within them and in the world around them and who are ready to hear and understand every reasonable thing even though it is against their heart's desires. Everything willed by the Almighty is governed by His wisdom. He guides only those people who value guidance. Those who do not value it are penalized and their ability to benefit from their innate guidance is lost what to speak of being provided further guidance from God. Jesus (sws) has said some very appropriate words in this regard and I have alluded to them at various places in this *tafsīr*.

In the sentence *هُوَ أَهْلُ التَّقْوَى وَأَهْلُ الْمَغْفِرَةِ* our exegetes generally regard the antecedent of the pronoun *هُوَ* to be God and interpret the verse to mean that only God is worthy of being feared of and worthy of being asked forgiveness from. In my opinion, however, it relates to *فَمَنْ شَاءَ ذَكَرْهُ*. The pronoun *مَنْ* is used both for singular and plural entities. Thus both singular and plural pronouns can be used for it. In other words, this verse informs us who will benefit from the reminders of the Qur'ān and as a result be worthy of being forgiven and who will be deprived of it: those who have God's fear, in them will benefit from these reminders and will be worthy of God's forgiveness. As for those whose hearts are devoid of God's fear, they will be deprived of this benefit and when they will be deprived of this, then they will also be deprived of God's forgiveness. In Sūrah Baqarah, under the verse *هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ* (2:4), I have already explained who will benefit from the Qur'ān and who will be deprived of it. Readers who wish to know the details of this divine practice are advised to look up the *tafsīr* of this verse. There are various levels of *taqwā*. The *taqwā* referred to in this verse is the one which is ingrained in human nature by the Almighty and which is alluded to in the verse *فَالْهَمَّهَا فَجُورَهَا وَتَقْوَاهَا* (8:91) (then [God] inspired it with its evil and its good, (91:8)). In the next *sūrah*, a complete picture of this *taqwā* ingrained in human nature will inshallāh be presented.

With the help and grace of God, with these lines, I come to the end of this *sūrah's tafsīr*. *فَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ عَلَى إِحْسَانِهِ* (gratitude be to God for His favours)

Rahmānābād,

18th Decemeber 1978 AD

17th Muḥarrām al-Ḥarām 1399 AH

Sūrah Qiyāmah

Central Theme and Relationship with the Previous Sūrah

Like the previous *sūrahs* of this group, this *sūrah* too warns the disbelievers about the Day of Judgement. The previous *sūrah* ended on the note that the real reason due to which the slaves to worldly pleasures were evading the reminders of this Day was that they had lost their innate guidance of discerning good and evil. The practice of the Almighty is that those who are alive to this guidance are blessed with further guidance, and those who become indifferent to it become so blind and deaf to the truth that no reminder is able to influence them.

In order to fully delineate this law of guidance, the Almighty has sworn by the reproaching soul found innately in every human being and has presented it to substantiate the Day of Judgement. This reproaching soul is hidden in a person and chides him on every evil that emanates from him. Its very existence in a human being is ample proof of the fact that man will not be left unaccountable and is not given any absolute powers. In other words, it is not possible that the Almighty remain unconcerned with what good or evil he may do. Man is a mini-world and the existence of the reproaching soul within him suggests that this mega-world also has a reproaching soul which is called the Judgement Day. It will manifest itself one day and reproach and chide people on their evil deeds – people who remained indifferent to their internal mechanism of reproach.

It is evident from this discussion that the greater Day of Judgement has a reflection in every human being in the form of his conscience and reproaching soul which can be termed as a lesser Day of Judgement. In other words, if a person does some evil, he does not do it in hiding; he does so at the very doors of the divine court of justice before a divine judge. Consequently, after presenting the reproaching soul as witness, the Qur'ān says: *بَلْ يُرِيدُ الْإِنْسَانُ لِيَفْجُرَ أَمَامَهُ* (in fact, man wants to be mischievous before his [conscience]). This very aspect is explained in subsequent verses by the words: *بَلْ الْإِنْسَانُ عَلَى نَفْسِهِ بَصِيرَةٌ وَلَوْ أَلْقَى مَعَاذِيرَهُ* (in fact, he himself is a witness upon his own self however much he may present excuses, (75:14-15)).

Here it should be kept in consideration that the experts of modern moral

philosophy have also acknowledged certain basic virtues as virtues and certain basic vices as vices and regarded this to be a foundational principle. They have then gone on to build their theories on this principle. However, they have not been able to tell from where they have deduced these virtues to be virtues and these vices to be vices. As a result, the edifices they have built have no foundation to stand upon. Nevertheless, they accept that man has an awareness of basic virtues and basic vices. In this *sūrah*, the Qur'ān has referred to this aspect by saying that the Almighty has not only made man innately aware of good and evil, He has also blessed him with a conscience which chides him on evil deeds and praises him on good ones. And then, the Qur'ān, on the basis of this psychological reality, has substantiated the Day of Judgement and the reward and punishment that will take place on that Day. In other words, if the Almighty has devised a method for reproaching a person from within him on every evil that emanates from him and praising him on every good that ensues from him, how is it possible that He will not bring about a Day of accountability for the whole of this world and each person be rewarded and punished for his deeds?

Analysis of the Discourse

Following is an analysis of the discourse of this *sūrah*:

Verses (1-6): An oath is sworn by the Day of Judgement on the certainty of the Day. The reproaching soul in man is also presented as a proof of this Day and it is asserted that those disbelievers who are demanding to hasten the advent of this day and regard their recreation after being decayed in the dust to be an impossibility are actually going against the very testimony of their conscience. Their example is that of an audacious thief who steals right before the eyes of the judge.

Verses (7-15): A rejoinder is sounded to those who are demanding to hasten the advent of the Day of Judgement: today they are trying to deny an obvious reality and are pestering the Prophet (sws) by asking him to hasten the arrival of the Day of Judgement; however, when it will come about with a great upheaval, they will acknowledge that there is no place for them to escape to. On that Day, there will be no resting place for anyone except with God. Each person will be called upon to answer for every deed of his, and this reality is not hidden to them even though they might try their utmost to cover it up by vain talk.

Verses (16-19): The Prophet (sws) is asked to refrain from showing hurry in acquiring the Qur'ān and is asked to exercise patience; however much his opponents might show haste, he should not be influenced by them and demand the Qur'ān be revealed soon; he should calmly acquire it in the manner it is being revealed and disseminate it to his people. The Almighty

is revealing it as per His wisdom and expediency. He has taken upon Himself the responsibility of its collection and arrangement, protection and preservation, explanation and elucidation. The Prophet (sws) should not worry about any of these aspects.

Verses (20-25): The disbelievers of the Day of Judgement are rebuked and told that they have no basis for this denial. Whatever baseless excuses they are offering originate from their love of this world against the call of their own conscience. They also originate from their indifference to the Hereafter whereas it is a certain reality. On that day, many faces will be fresh expecting the blessing of their Lord, and many faces will be gloomy thinking that a back-breaking calamity is about to befall them.

Verses (26-40): No one should remain under the misconception that the Almighty will let people go scot-free. Everyone will have to face the agony of death, and in this state of helplessness will have to take the journey towards his Lord. Unfortunate is he who neither spent in the way of God nor prayed to Him; on the contrary, whenever he would be reminded of these duties, he would express utter arrogance and walk away conceitedly to his family. Everyone should remember the fact that it is not at all difficult for the Almighty to re-create man once he dies and decays for it was the Almighty Who created him from a drop of sperm and perfected him and blessed him with various abilities.

Text and Translation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
 لَا أُفْسِمُ بِيَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ (١) وَلَا أُفْسِمُ بِالتَّفْهِيسِ اللَّوَامَةِ (٢) أَيْحَسِبُ الْإِنْسَانُ أَنْ لَنْ يَجْمَعَ عِظَامُهُ
 (٣) بَلَى قَادِرِينَ عَلَى أَنْ نُسَوِّيَ بَنَانَهُ (٤) بَلْ يُرِيدُ الْإِنْسَانُ لِيَفْجُرَ أَمَامَهُ (٥) يَسْأَلُ أَيَّانَ يَوْمُ
 الْقِيَامَةِ (٦) فَإِذَا بَرِقَ الْبَصَرُ (٧) وَخَسَفَ الْقَمَرُ (٨) وَجُمِعَ الشَّمْسُ وَالْقَمَرُ (٩) يَقُولُ
 الْإِنْسَانُ يَوْمَئِذٍ أَيْنَ الْمَقَرُّ (١٠) كَلَّا لَا وَزَرَ (١١) إِلَى رَبِّكَ يَوْمَئِذٍ الْمُسْتَقَرُّ (١٢) يُنَبِّأُ الْإِنْسَانُ
 يَوْمَئِذٍ بِمَا قَدَّمَ وَأَخَّرَ (١٣) بَلْ الْإِنْسَانُ عَلَى نَفْسِهِ بَصِيرَةٌ (١٤) وَلَوْ أَلْقَى مَعَاذِيرَهُ (١٥) لَا
 تُحْرَكُ بِهِ لِسَانُكَ لِتَعْجَلَ بِهِ (١٦) إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا جَمْعَهُ وَقُرْآنَهُ (١٧) فَإِذَا قَرَأَهُ فَاتَّبِعْ قُرْآنَهُ (١٨) ثُمَّ
 إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا بَيَانَهُ (١٩) كَلَّا بَلْ تُحِبُّونَ الْعَاجِلَةَ (٢٠) وَتَذَرُونَ الْآخِرَةَ (٢١) وَجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ نَاصِرَةٌ
 (٢٢) إِلَى رَبِّهَا نَاطِرَةٌ (٢٣) وَوُجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ بَاسِرَةٌ (٢٤) تَتَّظُنُّ أَنْ يُفْعَلَ بِهَا فَاقِرَةٌ (٢٥) كَلَّا إِذَا
 بَلَغَتِ التَّرَاقِيَ (٢٦) وَقِيلَ مَنْ رَاقٍ (٢٧) وَظَنَّ أَنَّهُ الْفِرَاقُ (٢٨) وَالْتَقَتِ السَّاقُ بِالسَّاقِ (٢٩)

إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ يَوْمَئِذٍ الْمَسَاقُ (٣٠) فَلَا صَدَقَ وَلَا صَلَّى (٣١) وَلَكِنْ كَذَّبَ وَتَوَلَّى (٣٢) ثُمَّ ذَهَبَ
إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهِ يَتَمَطَّى (٣٣) أَوَّلَىٰ لَكَ فَأَوَّلَىٰ (٣٤) ثُمَّ أَوَّلَىٰ لَكَ فَأَوَّلَىٰ (٣٥) أَيْحَسِبُ الْإِنْسَانُ أَنْ
يُتْرَكَ سُدًى (٣٦) أَلَمْ يَكْ نُظْفَئْ مِنْ مَنِيِّ يُمْنَى (٣٧) ثُمَّ كَانَ عِلْقَةً فَخَلَقَ فَسَوَّى (٣٨)
فَجَعَلَ مِنْهُ الزَّوْجَيْنِ الذَّكَرَ وَالْأُنثَى (٣٩) أَلَيْسَ ذَلِكَ بِقَادِرٍ عَلَىٰ أَنْ يُخْجِيَ الْمَوْتَى (٤٠)

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Ever Merciful.

By no means! I swear by the Day of Judgement. And by no means! I swear by the reproaching soul. Does man think that We will not be able to bring together his bones? Why not? We will put him together such that We will set right even the sections of his fingers. In fact, man wants to be mischievous before his [conscience]. He asks: “When will the Day of Judgement come?” (1-6)

Thus when the sight is dazed and the moon eclipsed and the sun and the moon brought together, at that time man will say “Whither to flee?” – No! there is no refuge now! Towards your Lord that Day is the abode. On that Day, man will be informed what he sent forth and what he left behind. In fact, he himself is a witness upon his own self however much he may put up excuses. (7-15)

To swiftly learn it, do not hastily move your tongue to read it. It is Our responsibility to collect and to recite it. So when We have recited it, follow this recital. Then upon Us is to explain it. (16-19)

Certainly not! In fact, you people only love this world and are heedless of the life to come. How many a face will be bright on that Day awaiting the graciousness of their Lord and how many a face will be gloomy on that Day apprehending that there is going to befall them a back-breaking calamity. (20-25)

Certainly not! On the Day when the soul will be stuck in the collar bone and it is said: “Who is it that can weave a spell now?” and he will think that it is parting time and the shank will embrace the shank. On that Day, towards your Lord is the departure. (26-30)

Thus he neither testified nor prayed; on the contrary, he denied and turned away. Then he went away to his people conceitedly. Woe be to you! Yet again woe be to you! And again woe be to you! Yes again woe be to you! (31-35)

Does man think that he will be left to go unchecked? Was he not a mere drop of sperm poured forth? Then he became a clot of blood and then God created him and then perfected him. Then made pairs of him: male and female. Is not that God able to raise the dead to life? (36-40)

Explanation

لَا أُقْسِمُ بِيَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ (١)¹

When a particle of negation occurs before an oath the way it has occurred here, it is not meant to negate the oath; it is in fact meant to refute a notion of the addressee for whose refutation the oath had been sworn in the first place. I have explained this style in various instances earlier as well. Examples of such a style not only abound in Arabic, it exists in most other languages as well. When we want to immediately refute a notion of someone, we say: “No! By God! The truth of the matter is such and such.” What is conveyed by such a style is that so baseless is the notion of the addressee that the speaker is not even willing to wait so much as to negate it after the oath; he refutes it and in fact finds it necessary to express his disgust before the oath. Some people have regarded the particle of negation as superfluous and some regard it to directly relate to the verb it precedes. However, as per linguistic principles of Arabic, both these views are not correct. I have refuted them at various places in this *tafsīr*. My mentor, Imām Ḥamīd al-Dīn Farāhī, has also discussed this issue at length in his *tafsīr*. Those who want to see the details are advised to look it up.

Here the complement of oath (*muqṣam ‘alayh*) is not mentioned for two reasons:

Firstly, it is so evident that there is no need to express it in words. In other words, the oath itself bears evidence to its complement. The sun is a witness on itself as they say. Many examples of such suppression can be seen in preceding *sūrahs*. For example, in Sūrah Qāf and in Sūrah Ṣu‘ād, the oaths of *وَالْقُرْآنِ الْمَجِيدِ* and *وَالْقُرْآنِ ذِي الذِّكْرِ* occur without their complements. The purpose of such oaths is to inform the addressee that what is being refuted by him is itself so obvious a testimony to its truth and veracity that there exists no possibility to deny it.

Secondly, the oath sworn by the reproaching soul mentioned subsequently is such a self-obvious testimony on the Day of Judgment that refuting it, as will be explained later, is tantamount to refuting one’s own conscience. In the presence of such a testimony, no further evidence is required for the Day of Judgement. In such cases, the premise which is to be substantiated and the testimony which substantiates it assume the status of the oath and the complement of oath respectively.

1. By no means! I swear by the Day of Judgement.

وَلَا أَقْسِمُ بِالنَّفْسِ اللَّوَّامَةِ (٢)²

This is the second oath. Its complement (*muqsam 'alayh*) is also not mentioned in words. The reason is that this complement is hidden within the oath. Thus what is implied is that the existence of the reproaching soul within man is evidence enough for the Day of Judgement. In other words, this second oath delineates both the oath and its complement, and points to the fact that no external evidence is required for this Day. Its reflection is found within man and he is able to see it too even though he may put forth various reasons to refute it.

The reproaching soul is not an independent entity; it is part of the human soul. The Almighty has fashioned the human soul such that He has blessed it with an awareness of good and evil. He has also prescribed a principle for the success and failure of a person: he who cleanses his soul of evil will succeed and he who contaminates his soul with evil will be doomed. In Sūrah Shams, the words are:

وَنَفْسٍ وَمَا سَوَّاهَا فَأَلْهَمَهَا فُجُورَهَا وَتَقْوَاهَا قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ زَكَّاهَا وَقَدْ خَابَ مَنْ دَسَّاهَا (٩١: ٧-١٠)

And the soul bears witness and the perfection given to it, then [God] inspired it with its evil and its good that he succeeded who purified it and he failed who soiled it. (91:7-10)

Because of being composed thus, at times, the human soul loses its balance by being overcome with its desires and induces a person to do evil. This proclivity of the soul is called the Enticing Soul (*nafs-i ammārah*) by the Qur'ān. The Prophet Joseph (sws) has referred to this aspect of the soul thus:

وَمَا أُبَرِّئُ نَفْسِي إِنَّ النَّفْسَ لَأَمَّارَةٌ بِالسُّوءِ (١٢: ٥٣)

I do not claim my soul to be free from sin: the soul is very prone to evil. (12:53)

However, this soul also possesses an awareness of virtue; hence as long as it is able to maintain balance, it even reproaches its own self if some vice emanates from it; at the same time, it also feels disgust and revulsion if some other person indulges in vice and reproaches it. It is this very aspect of the soul which is called the reproaching soul here.

The strategy which a person should adopt in maintaining the balance of

2. And by no means! I swear by the reproaching soul.

his soul is that he should keep his Lord and the Day of Judgement in his remembrance. This remembrance checks the soul and never lets the soul totally submit to its desires. If a person errs, the reproaching soul at once checks him, and makes him realize his folly; the person then turns to God in repentance and tries to make amends. The soul which is able to achieve this balance is called the Satisfied Soul (*naḥṣ-i muṭma'innah*). This is the highest position a person can reach in training and disciplining his soul. The Almighty has urged him to try to attain this position and blessed mankind with His divine law so that it can attain this position by adhering to it. Such a soul will be blessed with a unique gift in the Hereafter: The Almighty shall be pleased with it and it shall be pleased with the Almighty.

It is evident from this explanation that the awareness of vice being vice is innately found in man from the very moment he was created. Adam's son Cain while being overcome with jealousy killed Abel; however, after this murder, he tried to hide his corpse. This effort obviously was undertaken by him because he realized his sin. The most evil of men commits a sin not because he regards it to be a virtuous act, but because he is overwhelmed with desires and emotions. If he goes against his conscience in this matter, he does so against his natural inclinations. The proof of this is that if someone else commits the same sin against him he regards it to be a vice and protests against it. If one examines the conscience of wicked people, one will see that they too respect virtuous acts even though they do not do such acts. Ever since man started to live as a collectivity he has always set up a system of justice in it. Even though, at times, certain sins engulf a whole society and dominate virtue, the collective conscience of the society never condones this. In fact, there always exist people in such a society who carry out the same responsibility in it as is carried out by the reproaching soul found within every upright person. When the situation reaches the extent that a society becomes totally bereft of virtue, then as per the law of providence, such a society is wiped out from the face of the earth.

Now the question is that if a person has a guardian within his conscience which chides him on every evil that emanates from him, then how can it be imagined that man will not be held accountable for his deeds. Why would he go scot-free if he spends a life in whatever manner he wants to while negating the calls of his conscience? If a person will not be held accountable for his deeds, then where has this chiding conscience come into him from? If his Creator is unconcerned about the good and evil which emanates from him, then why and from where has He given him the feeling of being elated at a good deed and being pricked by his conscience at a bad one? Then from here another question

arises: If God has set up a miniature court of justice in every person, then why will He not set up a greater court of justice which will hold the whole world accountable for good and evil which emanate from it and not reward and punish people accordingly? Any person who deliberates on these questions while disregarding his desires will reach the conclusion that the very being of a person bears witness that he has innate knowledge of good and evil; he will not be left unaccountable; there definitely shall come one day when he will be punished for any misdeeds he may have done and be rewarded for his good deeds. To remind a person of this Day, the Almighty has placed a miniature court of justice within a person's soul so that man does not remain indifferent to it, and if ever he becomes indifferent he can catch a glimpse of it by merely reflecting on his inner-self. It is this reality which sages have taught us by saying that man is a miniature world and within this miniature world there is a reflection of the greater world. If a person has a true comprehension of his own self, he is able to comprehend both God and the Hereafter. The famous Socrates adage says: "Know Thyself".

أَيَحْسَبُ الْإِنْسَانُ أَلَّنْ نَجْمَعُ عِظَامَهُ (٣) بَلَى قَادِرِينَ عَلَى أَنْ نُسَوِّيَ بَنَانَهُ (٤)³

Although the general word "man" is used in these verses, the address is directed to the disbelievers of the Day of Judgement among the Quraysh whose doubts raised about this day have been discussed in the previous *sūrahs*. This general style of address is adopted to express disgust at their attitude. These verses assert that the evidence on the Day of Judgement is found within man; one does not have to look in the external world. However, these people are of the view that after dying and being decayed in dust the Almighty will not be able to bring together their bones. It is asserted in this verse that if this looks impossible to them and on its basis they deny the Day of Judgement even though their conscience bears witness to it, then they should remember that not only will the Almighty gather their bones, He will gather them with such power and perfection that even the sections of their fingers will be put together. The word بَنَانٌ means each of "the sections of a finger". The implication is that the Almighty will be able to join together even the minutest of joints.

The word قَادِرِينَ is an accusative of state (*hāl*) from the plural pronoun in نَجْمَعُ.

3. Does man think that We will not be able to bring together his bones? Why not? We will put him together such that We will set right even the sections of his fingers.

بَلْ يُرِيدُ الْإِنْسَانُ لِيَفْجُرَ أَمَامَهُ⁴

The implication of this verse is that it is mere vain talk on the part of the disbelievers to deny the Day of Judgement because they think that gathering bones is improbable. The reality is that they have become slaves to their desires: while following them they want to be mischievous before the judge appointed by the Almighty. This judge is not far away; he is sitting within them. Their example is that of a thief who wants to steal in front of a judge.

Exegetes have generally taken the word أَمَامَهُ (in front of him) to mean that man in his future life wants to continue to adhere to sin. For this reason, he tries to invent excuses for denying the Day of Judgement. However, if this interpretation is accepted, it does not relate to the reproaching soul and nor does it become an irrefutable argument against his attitude. Here the word “in front of” means before his conscience and reproaching soul he wants to be mischievous in spite of reminders from this faculty. The greatest evidence of the Day of Judgement is found within man; however, what can one do about a person who becomes adamant in denying his own self?

The argument found in this verse is that a man’s conscience is enough to bear evidence of the Day of Judgement; however, one cannot shut the mouth of a person who is audacious enough to tell a lie before his own conscience.

It also follows from this that a person who commits a vice against his reproaching soul or in other words his own conscience is one who actually commits vice in the presence of God. This is because one’s conscience is a judge appointed by God, as indicated above. Thus, a vice committed before it is a vice committed before God.

يَسْأَلُ أَيَّانَ يَوْمُ الْقِيَامَةِ⁵

This is a mention of the stubbornness of those who disbelieved in the Day of Judgement. In spite of the fact that an accountability court is found within them and they are also aware of it, they ask about the advent of that Day. They would sarcastically remark: “If it is to come why is it not coming? We are tired of being threatened about it. It was in fact never supposed to come and neither will it come in the future. So why should we be overawed by these threats. Those who are claiming that it will come one day must bring it and show it to us. Only then will

4. In fact man wants to be mischievous before his [conscience].

5. He asks: “When will the Day of Judgement come?”

we believe it. Mere verbal claims will not convince us.”

فَإِذَا بَرِقَ الْبَصَرُ (٧) وَخَسَفَ الْقَمَرُ (٨) وَجُمِعَ الشَّمْسُ وَالْقَمَرُ (٩) يَقُولُ الْإِنْسَانُ يَوْمَئِذٍ
أَيْنَ الْمَقَرُّ (١٠)⁶

The implication of these verses is that today these disbelievers are showing impatience at the delay in the Day of Judgement as if they are fully ready to encounter it. But where will they run to when they actually face its horrors?

Since the demand of being shown the Day of Judgement is an absolutely absurd demand, no reply is given by the Qur’ān to it. However, some horrific aspects of that Day are portrayed by it in these verses.

The state of affairs portrayed belongs to the category of the *mutashābihāt*. We cannot grasp their true form in this world. The purpose of this portrayal is to show that such will be the upheaval that will ensue on that Day that the sun and the moon will leave their own orbits and adopt the same path. Who can comprehend the horrific nature of this? The implication is that if people even have a semblance of intellect in them, they should seek refuge from these horrors and adhere to the path which is being shown to them and which will save them from these horrors. Thus they should stop showing impatience on its delay.

It should remain clear that the incidents which will happen on that Day mentioned here merely give a slight picture of what will happen, and are only a handful of what else will happen when the Day comes. In the coming *sūrahs* of this group, various other aspects of the Day will be depicted. These too will only be a few, for the tongue is unable to portray all of them.

كَلَّا لَا وَزَرَ (١١) إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ يَوْمَئِذٍ الْمُسْتَقَرُّ (١٢)⁷

This is the answer to the question quoted in the previous verse: “Whither to flee?” Except for seeking refuge with God all other paths and ways will be closed to them.

يُنَبِّئُ الْإِنْسَانُ يَوْمَئِذٍ بِمَا قَدَّمَ وَأَخَّرَ (١٣)⁸

Mentioned in this verse is the real reason for the advent of the Day of

6. Thus when the sight is dazed and the moon eclipsed and the sun and the moon brought together, at that time man will say “Whither to flee?”

7. – No! there is no refuge now! Towards your Lord that Day is the abode.

8. On that Day, man will be informed what he sent forth and what he left behind.

Judgement. Being informed here means being shown the consequences of the deeds. The results of both the vices a person committed in the previous world and the virtues he failed to attain will become apparent to him. At many places in the Qur'ān, it is specifically mentioned that on the Day of Judgement those who remained indifferent to it will express extreme frustration. They will express regret for not having done good deeds in the previous world and not having followed the warnings of the Messengers of God and not professing faith in them. The words قَدَّمَ and أَخَّرَ embrace all the evil deeds and vices committed by such people.

It should be kept in mind that to achieve success in the Hereafter, a person has to do many good deeds and evade evil ones. However, those who are indifferent to the Hereafter or deny it either are indifferent to or deviate from deeds which pave the way for their success in the Hereafter. On the other hand, all their life they keep committing deeds which will lead them to doom in the Hereafter. This verse sounds a warning to such deprived and bereft people.

بَلِّ الْإِنْسَانُ عَلَى نَفْسِهِ بَصِيرَةً^٩ (١٤) وَلَوْ أَلْقَى مَعَاذِيرُهُ (١٥)^٩

These verses explain what is mentioned earlier by the words: بَلِّ يُرِيدُ الْإِنْسَانُ لِيَفْجُرَ أَمَامَهُ (in fact, man wants to be mischievous before his [conscience]). There, the discourse with relation to the question posed by the opponents: يَسْأَلُ أَيَّانَ يَوْمُ الْقِيَامَةِ (when will the Day of Judgement come?) had shifted to the portrayal of the Day of Judgement. Now in this verse the discourse returns to its original course and the subject under discussion is completed. The expression بَصِيرَةً عَلَى نَفْسِهِ means شَاهِدٌ عَلَى نَفْسِهِ (he is a witness upon his own self). The reason for this has already been mentioned earlier: the reproaching soul within man bears witness to the Hereafter. There is no need to go far to find a testimony to this Day. He can see its reflection within his own conscience.

The word مَعَاذِيرُ is a plural of مَعَذَرَةٌ. It is actually مَعَاذِرُ. A ي has been added in it just as it has been added in مَنَاقِبُ. It means false pretexts and baseless excuses. There is an Arabic proverb: الْمَعَاذِرُ مَكَاذِبُ (excuses are but lies). Some people think that it is a plural of مِعْدَار which in the Yemenite tongue means “a curtain”. I disagree with this view because the Qur'ān has been revealed in the idiomatic language of the Quraysh and not that of the people of Yemen.

9. In fact, he himself is a witness upon his own self however much he may put up excuses.

لَا تُحَرِّكْ بِهِ لِسَانَكَ لِتَعْجَلَ بِهِ (١٦) إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا جَمْعَهُ وَقُرْآنَهُ (١٧) فَإِذَا قَرَأَهُ فَاتَّبِعْ قُرْآنَهُ (١٨) ثُمَّ إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا بَيَانَهُ¹⁰

These verses urge the Prophet (sws) to be patient on the hastiness and various new demands of his opponents. It was with the sole support of divine revelation through which the Prophet (sws) was able to truly discharge the heavy responsibility of openly warning his people imposed on him by the Almighty. He was like a soldier, fighting at a battle front, who could not move even one step without guidance from his Lord. In order to torment him, his opponents would raise all sorts of demands and objections before him. In this manner, they would try their utmost to check his advance in his preaching mission. Earlier in this *sūrah*, one of their demands is cited: they would ask the Prophet (sws) to bring forth the Day of Judgement which he was threatening them with; if it was certain to come, why was it not arriving? Similarly, they would object that if the Qur'ān is God's word, why was it not revealed all at once? In short, they would shower objections from all sides, and the Prophet (sws), on the other hand, would wait for divine revelation to answer all these objections. It was through divine revelation that that his heart would receive strength, his soul would be rejuvenated, his intellect guided and his determination strengthened. Consequently, it is evident both from the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth that whenever there was a delay in the advent of revelation because of some divine wisdom, he would keep looking up to the heavens. This impatience and keenness would also be evident when Gabriel would deliver the revelation to him. Like an enthusiastic student he would want to learn all the revelation as soon as possible and also preserve it fully lest even a drop of this blessed rain go waste. With this background in mind, let us now deliberate on these verses.

By the words لَا تُحَرِّكْ بِهِ لِسَانَكَ لِتَعْجَلَ بِهِ the Prophet (sws) has been stopped from showing hastiness and impatience which would overcome him whenever a revelation would descend upon him. Although the subject of keenness and hastiness is very commonly found in the literature of most languages, it is almost impossible to express in words the hastiness and impatience with which the Prophet (sws) would be overcome when he would receive a revelation after a long gap and in the face of his opponents idle talk. When a child is hungry and his mother presses him to

10. To swiftly learn it, do not hastily move your tongue to read it. It is Our responsibility to collect and to recite it. So when We have recited it, follow this recital. Then upon Us is to explain it.

her bosom, he wants to drink all the milk in a single breath; when a traveller exhausted from traversing a desert sees a bucket full of water after a long wait, he wants to gulp all of it in one sip; similarly, if a person, suffering from the pangs of being away from his beloved, receives a letter from her, he would want to read each and every word of it in a single glance. Although these examples are deficient, yet as indicated earlier, they can give us some idea of the hastiness and anxiety so spontaneously expressed by the Prophet (sws) whenever he would be blessed with divine revelation.

The reasons for this impatience were many, as referred to before. Thus, for example:

- All the strategy that needed to be adopted by him in the capacity of God's Messenger could only be known through divine revelation.
- His spiritual, moral and intellectual needs could only be fulfilled through it.
- He would receive from it the guidance needed to face the existing and future circumstances.
- It was through it that he would be able to answer the objections and demands which his adversaries would keep posing to him every now and then.
- His great love for knowledge and his sensitivity in preserving it also contributed very much to it.

All these motives were very genuine and noble; however, it was God's wisdom that the Qur'ān be revealed gradually – just as it was being done. Consequently, the Prophet (sws) was repeatedly urged to exercise patience. In Sūrah Tāhā (114-115) too he has been similarly urged. I have already referred to some aspects of this there. Here too the subject primarily is the same. However, with respect to his mental state during the time of revelation of this *sūrah*, here he has been subsequently assured of the preservation of the Qur'ān also. The Almighty has taken it upon Himself to collect and arrange it and to recite it before the Prophet (sws) and make him memorize it as well as to explain any verse of the Qur'ān which needs elaboration. The Prophet (sws) was told to be content on whatever portion of the Qur'ān he would receive and not show hastiness and anxiety about it. He should also not worry about its preservation. He should leave all these to his Lord. Every task would be completed at its appointed time in accordance with the wisdom of God.

The words **إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا جَمْعَهُ وَقُرْآنَهُ** sound an assurance to the Prophet (sws) on his anxiety referred to earlier. Since a great divine treasure was being

entrusted to him, it was but natural for him to preserve each and every word that was being given in his custody. The Almighty has assured him that the responsibility of preserving and reciting it is His responsibility.

The word **حَمَّعَ** is a comprehensive one: it means preservation in the heart of the Prophet (sws) and also bringing together all the parts of the Qur'ān. Consequently, the Prophet (sws) would continuously receive guidance regarding the placement of the revealed verses in various *sūrahs*. As a result, he would direct the collectors to insert these verses at their specific places. They, of course, obeyed these instructions diligently.

A further arrangement that was made by the Almighty was that in each Ramaḍān, the Prophet (sws) would read out the Qur'ān revealed till that time to Gabriel in order to safeguard any loss from memory. It is evident from various narratives that in the last Ramaḍān of the Prophet (sws) this reading took place twice. The word **فُرِئَ لَهُ** points to this reading.

The verse **فَإِذَا قَرَأَهُ فَاتَّبِعْ قُرْآنَهُ** implies that the Prophet (sws) should not ask that the Qur'ān be quickly revealed to him. He should leave the matter to God, Who would reveal it in a specific amount as per His wisdom. He will also arrange to preserve and collect and arrange it. The Prophet's responsibility is to only follow the recital of what has been read out to him of the Qur'ān. He should read it, act on it and call people towards it. Also, he should pay no heed to the demand of people who are asking for its revelation in one go.

A further assurance is sounded to the Prophet (sws) in the verse **ثُمَّ إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا بَيَانَهُ**. If explanation is required of any part of the Qur'ān, it is the responsibility of the Almighty to furnish it. The Prophet (sws) need not fret about this. It will be done when the time comes. This is a reference to the *tabyīn* verses which were revealed to explain and elucidate a previously revealed directive or to abrogate or to complete it. I have referred to these elucidatory verses at a number of places in this *tafsīr*. The words **كَذَلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ** generally occur after them. They actually are the fulfilment of the promise mentioned in **ثُمَّ إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا بَيَانَهُ**.

I will now present excerpts from the *tafsīr* of my mentor Imām Ḥamīd al-Dīn Farāhī which he has written while explaining these verses. He writes:¹¹

The exegetes think that the cause of the haste mentioned in these verses is that the Prophet (sws) would be anxious about losing any part of the Qur'ān. I do not differ with this view; however, there are some

11. Ḥamīd al-Dīn Farāhī, *Majmū'ah Tafāsīr*, 2nd ed. (Lahore: Faran Foundation, 1998), 211-212.

more details in this which need to be understood.

When the Prophet (sws) would receive divine guidance, he would think that he was being given a great responsibility and that he was being entrusted with a great thing; the slightest of blemish or loss of even a single letter would hold him accountable before God. Simultaneously, he wished to receive more and more divine revelation for any part of it might be instrumental in giving guidance to his people. Both these aspects are very evident regarding this matter. Consequently, the assurance sounded to him in this *sūrah* takes into consideration both these aspects.

The preservation of the Qur'ān has been promised by the Almighty both in a concise and comprehensive manner. Thus, for example, it is said:

وَإِنَّهُ لَكِتَابٌ عَزِيزٌ لَا يَأْتِيهِ الْبَاطِلُ مِنْ بَيْنِ يَدَيْهِ وَلَا مِنْ خَلْفِهِ تَنْزِيلٌ مِّنْ حَكِيمٍ
حَمِيدٍ (٤١: ٤١-٤٢)

And this is a mighty scripture. Falsehood cannot reach it neither from in front of it nor from behind it. It is a revelation from a wise and glorious God. (41:41-42)

At another place, the words are:

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ (٩: ١٥)

It was We that revealed the Reminder, and We shall Ourselves preserve it. (15:9)

It is evident from these verses that there is no possibility of any addition or deletion in the Qur'ān. Consequently, there exists a consensus in the whole of this *ummah* that the Qur'ān has remained preserved. The popular view attributed to the Imāmiyyah sect that a part of the Qur'ān has been made to disappear is totally against the opinion of their authorities. Sayyid Murtadā, Muḥammad Ibn Ḥasan al-Tūsī (popularly known as the Sheikh al-Tāi'fah), Abū 'Alī Ṭabarī, Ṭabrisī (the author of *Majma' al-bayān*), Muḥammad Ibn 'Alī ibn Bābawayh al-Qummī – all have vehemently denied this absurd view. Muḥammad ibn 'Alī ibn Bābawayh al-Qummī says: “It is our belief that the very Qur'ān revealed to the Prophet by the Almighty is the one which is found between two covers in the Muslim *ummah*. There is not a single letter of the Qur'ān more than this. A person who attributes to

us the view that we believe the Qur'ān consisted of more is a liar.” Regarding the narratives which are found in their literature in this matter, Sayyid Murtaḍā says that those among the Imāmiyyah and the Ḥashawiyyah sects who differ with this view are of no significance because their view is based on some weak Aḥādīth that they regard to be authentic. However, on the basis of such weak Aḥādīth, a proven and a certain reality cannot be rejected.

Farāhī subsequently goes on to state the conclusions he has drawn from the above quoted verses of Sūrah Qiyāmah:¹²

First, the Qur'ān was collected and arranged in the lifetime of the Prophet (sws) and recited to him in a specific sequence. If this promise was to be fulfilled after his death, he would not have been asked to follow this new recital [referred to by the words: “So when We have recited it out, follow this recital”].

Second, the Prophet (sws) was directed to read the arranged Qur'ān in its new sequence ... this directive means that the Prophet (sws) must have communicated the final arrangement of the Qur'ān the way it was finally recited to him. And this arrangement must have been the same as the one found in the guarded tablet (the *lawḥ-i mahfūz*). This is because the final recital had to match the original recital [found in the tablet].

Third, after this collection and arrangement, the Almighty explained whatever He intended to from among specifying a general directive or vice versa, furnishing supplementary directives and reducing the scope of some directives.

Farāhī further states:¹³

All these conclusions are evident from the Qur'ān and also corroborated by Ḥadīth literature. Consequently, the Prophet (sws) would read out whole *sūrahs* of the Qur'ān to people and this could not have been possible unless they had been read out to him in their specific sequences. The Companions (rta) would listen to and preserve the Qur'ān in accordance with this arrangement and abide by it. It is known that the Prophet (sws) would direct the Companions (rta) to place the revealed verses of the Qur'ān at specific places of specific

12. Ibid., 212-213.

13. Ibid., 213.

sūrahs and the Companions (rta) would obey this directive. Then when some explanatory verse would be revealed, the Prophet (sws) would have it written at either the place immediately following the verses which needed this explanation or at the end of the *sūrah* in case these verses related to the whole theme of the *sūrah*.

Deliberation reveals another distinct feature of these explanatory verses: they themselves contained words which would show that these verses have in fact been revealed as explanation. They would generally be of the wording: كَذَٰلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ آيَاتِهِ لِلنَّاسِ (thus does the Almighty explain His verses for people ...)

Similarly, it is known from authentic and agreed upon narratives that once the whole of the Qur'ān had been revealed, Gabriel recited the complete Qur'ān to the Prophet (sws) in its real sequence. This clears many doubts about the sequence and arrangement of the Qur'ān.

كَلَّا بَلْ تُحِبُّونَ الْعَاجِلَةَ (٢٠) وَتَذَرُونَ الْآخِرَةَ (٢١)¹⁴

After urging the Prophet (sws) to show patience on the piecemeal revelation of the Qur'ān, the discourse returns to its original sequence. The disbelievers are addressed and told that their attitude about the Day of Judgement is not because they do not have any argument in its support; its greatest argument is found in their own conscience. The real reason for this attitude of denial is that they are infatuated with this world and its luxuries, and do not have the patience and grit to leave its immediate pleasures for the deferred pleasures of the Hereafter.

The words وَتَذَرُونَ الْآخِرَةَ mean “you are showing indifference to the Hereafter”. The implication is that the Hereafter is not hidden from them; since the pleasures of this world are at hand and those of the Hereafter are not, they are intentionally showing indifference to the Hereafter.

وَجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ نَّاضِرَةٌ (٢٢) إِلَىٰ رَبِّهَا نَاطِرَةٌ (٢٣) وَوُجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ بَاسِرَةٌ (٢٤) تَظُنُّ أَنْ يُفْعَلَ بِهَا فَاقِرَةٌ (٢٥)¹⁵

The implication of these verses is that if for the sake of this world they are showing indifference to the Hereafter they should do so; but they

14. Certainly not! In fact you people only love this world and are heedless of the life to come.

15. How many a face will be bright on that Day awaiting the graciousness of their Lord and how many a face will be gloomy on that Day apprehending that there is going to befall them a back-breaking calamity.

should remember that the reality they are disregarding is certain to come, and on that Day the situation will be totally different. The faces of those who spent their life in its awareness will be fresh and bright. They will await the blessings and mercy of God. On the other hand, the faces of those who led their lives while being indifferent to it will be bleak and gloomy and they will apprehend a calamity which will break their backs.

Portrayed in these verses is actually the situation that will arise before people enter Paradise or Hell. When those worthy of Paradise will see that at every step angels are welcoming them with words of peace and reverence, their faces will turn bright in anticipation of the bright future which awaits them. They will be hopeful that the time is arriving when they will be the recipients of God's promised mercy in its ultimate form. On the contrary, the situation faced by the disbelievers at each step will make their faces glum and gloomy: they will anticipate the back-breaking punishment promised to them and to which they had paid no heed in the previous world.

The words *إِلَى رَبِّهَا نَاظِرَةٌ* mean that these people will await the blessings and favours of their Lord. When the preposition *إِلَى* is used with *نَظَرَ* just as it means to look at something, it also means to await someone's blessings and favours. Lexicographers explain this thus: if someone says *إِنَّمَا نَنْظُرُ إِلَى اللَّهِ ثُمَّ إِلَيْكَ* to someone from whom he is expecting blessings and favours, it would mean: "I await God's blessings and after them your favours".¹⁶

The context also supports this interpretation. The mental state of those who will be going to Hell is depicted thus: *تَنْظُرُ أَنْ يُفْعَلَ بِهَا فَاقِرَةٌ* (apprehending that there is going to befall them that which breaks their backs). Because of this apprehension, their faces will be gloomy and apprehensive. In contrast, the believers are described as those who will expect and await the manifestation of their Lord's greatest mercy and as a result their faces will be joyous and cheerful.

The expression *أَنْ يُفْعَلَ بِهَا فَاقِرَةٌ* is grammatically analyzed by Zamakhsharī thus:¹⁷ *أي يفعل بها فعل هو في شدته و فطاعته فاقرة* (they will be meted out such punishment of which the intensity will break their backs). Although other grammatical analyses are also possible, I would prefer this. Examples of this will be seen in the succeeding *sūrahs*.

16. Sa'īd al-Khūrī Shartūnī, *Aqrab al-mawārid fī fuṣaḥi al-'arabiyyah wa al-shawārid*, 1st ed., vol. 5 (Tehrān: Dār al-uswah, 1416 AH), 432.

17. Abū al-Qāsim Muḥammad ibn 'Umar al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf 'an ḥaqā'iq al-tanzīl wa 'uyūn al-aqāwīl fī wujūh al-ta'wīl*, vol. 4 (Beirut: Dār ihyā' al-turāth al-'arabī, n.d.), 664.

The word فَاقْرَءْ refers to a calamity which shatters the bones of the spinal chord.

Some people derive man's observation of God by the verse إِلَىٰ رَبِّهَا نَاطِرَةٌ. In my opinion, this verse does not refer to this if its context and occasion are understood. It is, in fact, a verse with an entirely different context and occasion. Similarly, those who oppose man's observation of God and in frenzy of this opposition alter the meaning of the preposition إِلَىٰ have erred in their interpretation. My view on this issue is that our belief in God in this world is not based on observation of Him. We believe in Him because certain signs and indications strongly point to His existence; however, in the Hereafter our belief in Him will be based on direct observation, and we will be able to directly witness every reality we profess faith in. As far as the nature of this observation is concerned, we cannot determine it in this world. It is from the category of *mutashābihāt* and one is not allowed to delve into the *mutashābihāt*. Only God, the Almighty knows the nature of this observation.

كَلَّا إِذَا بَلَغَتِ النَّرَاقِي (٢٦) وَقِيلَ مَنْ رَاقٍ (٢٧) وَظَنَّ أَنَّهُ الْفِرَاقُ (٢٨) وَالتَّقَتِ السَّاقُ
بِالسَّاقِ (٢٩) إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ يَوْمَئِذٍ الْمَسَاقُ (٣٠)¹⁸

Those who are slaves to worldly pleasures are reminded of the agonies of death and of the state of helplessness a person will be in at that time. They should not regard the Day of Judgement to be improbable. It shall definitely come and they will have to take the long journey back to their Lord. Their vigour and enthusiasm will end; so helpless will they be that the shank will embrace the shank. It is in their own interest to prepare for this journey and turn towards the Almighty before this happens and before their souls are stuck in the collar bone.

Whatever my mentor, Imām Farāhī, has written while explaining these verses is based on sound research. In the following paragraphs, I will summarize in his own words what he has written in his *tafsīr*. He writes:¹⁹

The pronoun found in the phrase بَلَغَتِ النَّرَاقِي is for the soul which is not mentioned here. An example of such a suppression also occurs in the following verse of Sūrah Wāqī'ah: (٨٣:٥٦) فَلَوْلَا إِذَا بَلَغَتِ الْخُلُوفَ (when

18. Certainly not! On the Day when the soul will be stuck in the collar bone and it is said: "Who is it that can weave a spell now?" and he will think that it is parting time and the shank will embrace the shank. On that Day, towards your Lord is the departure.

19. Ibid., 215-218.

under your very eyes a man's soul reaches the throat, (56:83)). Such a suppression is customary in Arabic. Hence it was not necessary to mention the antecedent of the pronoun. Examples of such a suppression are also found in classical Arabic.

Hātim Ṭā'ī says:

أماوي ما يغني الثراء عن الفتى
إذا حشرجت يوما وضاق بها الصدر

(O Māwīyah! What use will wealth be to a person when the soul will be trapped in the chest.)²⁰

In the above quoted couplet, the *nomen agentis* (*fā'il*) of the verb is the soul but has been suppressed as per the linguistic principle alluded to earlier. Examples of such a suppression are also found in the Qur'ān. In Sūrah Faṭir, it is said: (مَا تَرَكَ عَلَى ظَهْرِهَا مِنْ دَابَّةٍ (35:45)) (not one creature would be left alive on the earth's surface, (35:45)). Here one can see that the antecedent of the pronoun *هَا* which is "the earth" has been suppressed ... The sentence *وَقِيلَ مَنْ رَاقٍ* (and it is said: "Who is it that can weave a spell now?") expresses the severity and sensitivity of the situation. The passive tense *قِيلَ* has great eloquence in it. In other words, such will be the severity of the situation that no one will be able to pay attention to the person who will speak these words. To put it another way, the importance of these words will make people totally indifferent to their speaker. Everyone will be rehearsing these words. When the word *مَنْ* comes before an undefined noun, it implies severity in demand or great despair. Ṭarfah says:

إذا القوم قالوا من فتى خلت أنني
عنيت فلم أكسل ولم أتبدل

(When the nation calls out: "Is there a young man?" I understand that they are referring to me; then I do not display laziness and weakness.)²¹

... let us now see what the intentionality of the verse is and the purpose for which this style has been adopted here. In my opinion, the verse can be interpreted in two ways and there is in reality no difference

20. Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'arab*, vol. 13, 333.

21. Ṭarfah ibn al-'Abd, *Dīwān*, vol. 1, 5.

between these two interpretations.

The first interpretation is that when a person will be close to death and will be in an unconscious state, the attendants will worriedly call out: “Is there some conjurer who can cure this dying person?”

The second interpretation is that the attendants will say: “The matter is now finished; who can cure this dying man?” This of course is an expression of hopelessness and when the sick person will hear it, he will become sure that the time for his departure has arrived. The following couplet by Khansā portrays this situation:

لكن سهام المنايا من يصين له
لم يشفه طب ذي طب ولا راق

(He who is stung by the arrows of death cannot be cured by the competence of a doctor nor the conjuring of a conjurer.)²²

Both these interpretations of the verse are possible and I have presented both of them for [the analysis of the readers]. They can adopt anyone of them. However, in my opinion, the second of these interpretations is closer to the context.

While explaining the expression *والتفت الساق بالساق*, Farāhī writes:

The meaning of the shank embracing the shank is that a person will not be able to walk. This will be because of intense weakness and helplessness. As long as a person is alive, he is vigorously active in all spheres of his life; however, when he dies, it seems that his shanks have mutually embraced themselves.

... “the shank embracing the shank” is a very apt expression of frailty and helplessness. The purport of the verse is: what will happen when a doctor loses hope in the sick person, relatives withdraw in frustration, the once obedient limbs are no longer under control and he has to go to his Lord with a heavy burden?

Some people have interpreted the word *ساق* to mean “severity of the situation”. However, this view is of those people who have no knowledge of the Arabic language. These people do not understand the difference between the whole and the part. No doubt, the words

22. Abū al-Farj al-Aṣḥbahānī, *Āghānī*, vol. 16, 71.

كشف عن الساق when taken as a single expression is commonly used in Arabic to connote “vigour, liveliness and eagerness”. However, when these words are used separately, then the word كشف means “to unveil” and الساق means “the shank”. It is not that when used separately, then too they will connote the same meaning as they carry when used together in this expression.

A narrative ascribed to Ibn ‘Abbās (rta) says that الساق means the last day of this world and the first day of the next. I think the narrators have not faithfully transmitted what he might have said. If the ascription is correct, it could be a reference to the situation which would arise at that time and not a delineation of the meaning of this word.

Once the correct meaning of the shank embracing the shank is understood, the occasion and context of the next sentence: إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ يَوْمَئِذٍ الْمَسَاقُ (on that Day, towards your Lord is the departure) can be grasped automatically. It is as if man is scolded for his indifference in preparing for this journey; he remained busy acquiring worldly pleasures and luxuries and reached a stage when in this pursuit he lost all his strength and energy; how will he now be able to reach his Lord in such a state?

فَلَا صَدَقَ وَلَا صَلَّى (٣١) وَلَكِنْ كَذَّبَ وَتَوَلَّى (٣٢) ثُمَّ ذَهَبَ إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهِ يَتَمَطَّى (٣٣)
أُولَىٰ لَكَ فَأُولَىٰ (٣٤) ثُمَّ أُولَىٰ لَكَ فَأُولَىٰ (٣٥)²³

Depicted in these verses is the state of deprivation of these disbelievers of the Hereafter: the journey is very exacting; yet they have no resources and provisions to take along. They have neither offered the prayer to the Almighty nor spent in His way even though these were the two deeds which were to be of use to them in this journey.

An ellipsis of the word بِالْحُسْنَى has occurred after صَدَقَ because of strong linguistic indications. In Sūrah Layl, this suppression is expressed thus:

فَأَمَّا مَنْ أَعْطَىٰ وَاتَّقَىٰ وَصَدَّقَ بِالْحُسْنَىٰ فَسَنُيَسِّرُهُ لِلْيُسْرَىٰ (٩٢: ٥-٧)

So, he who gave in the way of Allah and was God-fearing and attested to the good fate of the Hereafter, We shall make him traverse an easy path. (92:5-7)

23. Thus he neither testified nor prayed; on the contrary, he denied and turned away. Then he went away to his people conceitedly. Woe be to you! Yet again woe be to you! And again woe be to you! Yet again woe be to you!

It needs to be kept in consideration that spending in the way of God is very difficult for people who do not believe in the Hereafter and the good fate encountered there. This abyss can only be crossed by those whose hearts are satisfied that whatever they will spend shall be returned to them in the form of an eternal treasure in the Hereafter. It is this belief in the reward of the Hereafter which motivates a person to spend in the way of God. Those who deny it are never induced to such spending. In Sūrah Layl, the verses succeeding the ones quoted earlier portray this fact thus:

وَأَمَّا مَنْ بَخِلَ وَاسْتَغْنَىٰ وَكَذَّبَ بِالْحُسْنَىٰ فَسَنُيَسِّرُهُ لِلْعُسْرَىٰ (٩٢: ٨-١٠)

And he who showed miserliness and was indifferent and belied the good fate, We shall make him traverse an arduous path, (92: 8-10)

In the light of these verses, the meaning of فَلَا صَدَقَ will be that the person neither attested to the good fate of the Hereafter nor did he spend in the way of the Almighty. In other words, the meanings of both rejecting the Hereafter and stinginess are implied in this expression. After this, the words are: وَلَا صَلَّى (and he did not pray). In other words, the real motive for spending in the way of God and offering the prayer is belief in reward in the Hereafter. When this belief is non-existent in them, how can these deeds emanate from these people.

Here once again let us refresh what is so often expressed in this *tafsīr*: it is on prayer and spending in the way of God – the two primary deeds – that the *sharī'ah* is based. It is evident from this verse that both of these are themselves dependent upon belief in the Hereafter. People in whom this belief is not strong, will not be able to undertake them.

In the verse: وَلَكِنْ كَذَّبَ وَتَوَلَّى, the word كَذَّبَ occurs in contrast to صَدَقَ and the word تَوَلَّى occurs in contrast to صَلَّى. In other words, what was befitting for them was to testify to the Messenger and to the Hereafter and spend in the way of God and offer the prayer to Him; however, they belied the Hereafter and became indifferent.

The verse ثُمَّ دَهَبَ إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهِ يَتَمَطَّى portrays this indifference and a little deliberation will show that the reason for this indifference has also been referred to in it: When people whose wealth and children have made them arrogant are reminded to fear God and the Hereafter, such reminders have no effect on them. They think that their affluence and abundance in family members is a sure sign of them being on the right path. For this reason, they do not entertain the reminders of people who try to point out their folly. Instead of being influenced by such reminders, they

conceitedly take a walk to their family vainly taking their prosperity and riches to be a clear sign of their correctness. Moreover, they go as far as to think that the real fault lies in people themselves bereft of prosperity yet are sounding such reminders and admonitions.

Here one should keep in mind what the Qur'ān mentions very frequently in various styles: the believers live amongst their family members continuously fearing the Almighty lest they are not able to properly care for the family and in this way earn God's wrath in any way. This sense of responsibility on the part of the believers is expressed thus in the Qur'ān: (٢٦:٥٢) قَالُوا إِنَّا كُنَّا قَبْلُ فِي أَهْلِنَا مُشْفِقِينَ (they will say: "we have always remained fearful in the matter of our family," (52:26)). Exactly opposite is the attitude of people whose hearts are devoid of God's fear. They regard their family to be a source of pride and conceit and as a clear sign of their good fortune. For this reason, they are in the state of inebriation mentioned in the anecdote of the companion of an orchard in Sūrah Kahaf in these words: (٣٥:١٨) مَا أَظُنُّ أَنْ تَبِيدَ هَذِهِ أَبَدًا (I don't reckon that this will ever perish! (18:35)). The mentality of such people is mentioned thus in Sūrah Muṭaffifīn: وَإِذَا انْقَلَبُوا إِلَى أَهْلِهِمْ انْقَلَبُوا فَكِهِينَ (٣١: ٨١) (and when they would return to their people, they would return engrossed, (81:31)).

In the verses: أَوَّلَى لَكَ فَأَوَّلَى ثُمَّ أَوَّلَى لَكَ فَأَوَّلَى, the word أَوَّلَى is from ويل which is used for expressing anger, reproach, and hatred. In classical Arabic, this word is used abundantly. For example, Khansā' says:

هممت بنفسي كل الهموم
فأولى لنفسي أولى لها

(I made many intentions about my soul; what a pity on my soul; what a pity.)²⁴

Some Urdu translators have translated it as "befitting" which is against Arabic principles and also not in accordance with the context.

In the previous verses, the address was indirect. Here in these verses the address has become direct. This change in address is to express sorrow and hatred. I have alluded to this aspect at various places in this *tafsīr*.

أَيَحْسَبُ الْإِنْسَانُ أَنْ يُتْرَكَ سُدًى (٣٦) أَلَمْ يَكُنْ نُطْفَةً مِنْ مَنِيٍّ يُُمْنَى (٣٧) ثُمَّ كَانَ عَلَقَةً فَخَلَقَ فَسَوَّى (٣٨) فَجَعَلَ مِنْهُ الزَّوْجَيْنِ الذَّكَرَ وَالْأُنْثَى (٣٩) أَلَيْسَ ذَلِكَ بِقَادِرٍ عَلَى أَنْ

24. Al-Khansā', *Dīwān*, vol. 1, 102.

Here in these verses, the *sūrah* ends on the very subject with which it began. In the beginning it was said: *أَيَحْسَبُ الْإِنْسَانُ أَنْ نَجْمَعَ عِظَامَهُ بَلَىٰ قَادِرِينَ* (does man think that We will not be able to bring together his bones? Why not? We can put him together even his very finger-sections, (75: 3-4)). After that, the discourse had shifted to man's arrogance and his deliberate concealment of the truth and to the portrayal of the horrific events of the Day of Judgement. Now, here at the end, this question is raised again and answered: do people who express their doubt on being raised to life again after death think that man will be left unaccountable? If leaving him unaccountable is against the justice and wisdom of the Almighty, how will re-creating him again be difficult for the Almighty? Does he not reflect on the various stages of his creation. His creation begins with a drop of fluid being poured forth in the mother's womb. The passive tense in the word *يُمْنَى* points to a lack of attention and any elaborate arrangement. The person who pours it forth has nothing more to do with it after this act; he has no knowledge of what happens to it and what it undergoes. All later changes and developments in it are done by providence which, with remarkable creativity, makes it pass through various stages encompassed in layers of darkness. The drop of fluid becomes a clot of blood. Then it is brought into shape and later perfected. Finally, it emerges in the form of a man or a woman. In all these stages, it is providence which fashions and moulds it; no one else has any role in this. Therefore, man needs to realize that the God Whose signs of power, wisdom and creativity can be so abundantly seen in this way in a human being, is amply capable of recreating him once he dies.

With the grace of God, with these lines, I come to the end of this *sūrah's tafsīr*. *وله الحمد في الدنيا والآخرة* (gratitude be to Him in this world and in that to come)

Raḥmānābād,
19th January, 1979 AD
19th Safr, 1399 AH

25. Does man think that he will be left to go unchecked? Was he not a mere drop of sperm poured forth? Then he became a clot of blood and then God created him and then perfected him. Then made pairs of him: male and female. Is not that God able to raise the dead to life?

Sūrah Dahr

Central Theme and Relationship with the Previous Sūrah

This *sūrah* is the counterpart of Sūrah Qiyāmah, the previous *sūrah*. It begins with the very subject on which the previous *sūrah* had ended. If the last four verses of the previous *sūrah* and the first three of the current *sūrah* are deliberated upon, one will realize that they dovetail into one another. Such an affinity is evident in all paired-*sūrahs*. Examples can be seen in earlier surahs.

The central theme of both *sūrahs* is the same; however, the nature of arguments and methodology of discussion are different in both. In the first *sūrah*, the Day of Judgement is substantiated by the chiding soul present within man; it is explained that the obvious requirement of he being blessed with the faculties of sight and hearing and with the awareness of good and evil is that a Day of Judgement come; on this day, those who had shown gratitude to God and fulfilled the obligations of His favours be rewarded, and those who took to disbelief by not fulfilling these obligations should be punished for their blindness. If this reward or punishment does not take place, it would mean that the grateful and the ungrateful are alike in the eyes of God.

In some *maṣāḥif*, this *sūrah* is regarded to be Madīnan. However, in my opinion, not even one verse of this *sūrah* was revealed in Madīnah, what to speak of the whole *sūrah*. The real criterion to judge whether a *sūrah* is Makkan or Madīnan is its subject matter. In the forthcoming pages, an analysis of this subject matter and the *tafsīr* of its verses will show that those who have regarded it to be Madīnan have no grounds to hold this view.

Analysis of the Discourse

Verses (1-3): An allusion to an obvious reality regarding the creation of man: for a certain period of time he was a non-entity. The Almighty took him out from the darkness of non-existence and granted him the light of existence. He created him from a drop of fluid, and after making this drop pass through various phases fashioned it into a being who was able to hear and understand. The Almighty then, after making him aware of both good and evil, tests him as to whether he becomes grateful or ungrateful.

Verses (4-22): A mention of the natural consequence of man being blessed with the awareness of good and evil. Then briefly the grievous fate of people who do not value this blessing of the Almighty and adopt the path of disbelief is mentioned. This is followed by a mention of the great reward which people will be blessed with – people who were thankful for this blessing and spent their life keeping in view the fact that they will be held accountable for their deeds.

Verses (23-28): An exhortation to the Prophet (sws) to show perseverance and disregard the demands and objections of the disbelievers and the ingrates; he should repose his trust in the God who revealed the Qur'ān to him; He will help him in every difficulty. The Prophet (sws) is urged to seek patience and perseverance through the prayer and through remembering God. The real ailment of the disbelievers is that they do not have the courage to sacrifice the immediate gains of this world for the deferred benefits of the Hereafter. To conceal this ailment, they are fabricating various objections against the Hereafter even though it is absolutely clear to them that it is certain to come and the Prophet (sws) is warning them of its advent. It is not at all difficult for God to create them again just as He created them the first time.

Verses (29-31): A warning is sounded to the adversaries of the Prophet (sws) that the latter's responsibility is just to make people aware of this warning; it is for them to benefit from it or to reject it. Once he informs them of this warning, he will have fulfilled his responsibility. God has a definite law as per which He guides people; according to this law, only those people who pay heed to His warnings will be worthy of guidance; those who will not be worthy of it and will remain adamant in their disbelief, will become the fuel of Hell. Every act of the Almighty is governed by His knowledge and wisdom.

Text and Translation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

هَلْ أَتَى عَلَى الْإِنْسَانِ حِينٌ مِّنَ الدَّهْرِ لَمْ يَكُنْ شَيْئًا مَّذْكُورًا (١) إِنَّا خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ
مِنْ نُطْفَةٍ أَمْشَاجٍ نَّبْتَلِيهِ فَجَعَلْنَاهُ سَمِيعًا بَصِيرًا (٢) إِنَّا هَدَيْنَاهُ السَّبِيلَ إِمَّا شَاكِرًا وَإِمَّا
كَفُورًا (٣) إِنَّا أَعْتَدْنَا لِلْكَافِرِينَ سَلَاسِلًا وَأَغْلَالًا وَسَعِيرًا (٤) إِنَّ الْأَبْرَارَ يَشْرَبُونَ مِنْ
كَأْسٍ كَانَ مِزَاجُهَا كَافُورًا (٥) عَيْنًا يَشْرَبُ بِهَا عِبَادُ اللَّهِ يُفَجِّرُونَهَا تَفْجِيرًا (٦) يُوفُونَ
بِالتَّذْرِ وَيَخَافُونَ يَوْمًا كَانَ شَرُّهُ مُسْتَطِيرًا (٧) وَيُطْعَمُونَ الطَّعَامَ عَلَى حُبِّهِ مِسْكِينًا وَيَتِيمًا

وَأَسِيرًا (٨) إِنَّمَا نُطْعِمُكُمْ لَوْجَهَ اللَّهِ لَا نُرِيدُ مِنْكُمْ جَزَاءً وَلَا شُكُورًا (٩) إِنَّا نَخَافُ مِنْ رَبَّنَا يَوْمًا عَبُوسًا قَمْطَرِيرًا (١٠) فَوَقَاهُمُ اللَّهُ شَرَّ ذَلِكَ الْيَوْمِ وَلَقَّاهُمْ نَضْرَةً وَسُرُورًا (١١) وَجَزَاهُمْ بِمَا صَبَرُوا جَنَّةً وَحَرِيرًا (١٢) مُتَكَبِّينَ فِيهَا عَلَى الْأَرَائِكِ لَا يَرَوْنَ فِيهَا شَمْسًا وَلَا زَمَهْرِيرًا (١٣) وَدَانِيَةً عَلَيْهِمْ ظِلَالُهَا وَذُلَّتْ قُطُوفُهَا تَذْلِيلًا (١٤) وَيُطَافُ عَلَيْهِمْ بِآنِيَةٍ مِنْ فِضَّةٍ وَأَكْوَابٍ كَانَتْ قَوَارِيرَ (١٥) قَوَارِيرَ مِنْ فِضَّةٍ قَدَّرُوهَا تَقْدِيرًا (١٦) وَيُسْقَوْنَ فِيهَا كَأْسًا كَانَ مِزَاجُهَا زَنْجَبِيلًا (١٧) عَيْنًا فِيهَا تُسَمَّى سَلْسَبِيلًا (١٨) وَيَطُوفُ عَلَيْهِمْ وِلْدَانٌ مُخَلَّدُونَ إِذَا رَأَيْتَهُمْ حَسِبْتَهُمْ لُؤْلُؤًا مَنثورًا (١٩) وَإِذَا رَأَيْتَ ثَمَّ رَأَيْتَ نَعِيمًا وَمُلَكًا كَبِيرًا (٢٠) عَلَيْهِمْ ثِيَابٌ سُنْدُسٌ خُضْرٌ وَإِسْتَبْرَقٌ وَحُلُّوا أَسَاوِرَ مِنْ فِضَّةٍ وَسَقَاهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ شَرَابًا طَهُورًا (٢١) إِنَّ هَذَا كَانَ لَكُمْ جَزَاءً وَكَانَ سَعْيُكُمْ مَشْكُورًا (٢٢) إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا عَلَيْكَ الْقُرْآنَ تَنْزِيلًا (٢٣) فَاصْبِرْ لِحُكْمِ رَبِّكَ وَلَا تُطِعْ مِنْهُمْ آيِمًا أَوْ كَفُورًا (٢٤) وَادْكُرْ اسْمَ رَبِّكَ بُكْرَةً وَأَصِيلًا (٢٥) وَمِنَ اللَّيْلِ فَاسْجُدْ لَهُ وَسَبِّحْهُ لَيْلًا طَوِيلًا (٢٦) إِنَّ هَؤُلَاءِ يُحِبُّونَ الْعَاجِلَةَ وَيَذَرُونَ وَرَاءَهُمْ يَوْمًا ثَقِيلًا (٢٧) نَحْنُ خَلَقْنَاهُمْ وَشَدَدْنَا أَسْرَهُمْ وَإِذَا شِئْنَا بَدَّلْنَا أَمْثَالَهُمْ تَبْدِيلًا (٢٨) إِنَّ هَذِهِ تَذْكِرَةٌ فَمَنْ شَاءَ اتَّخَذْ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِ سَبِيلًا (٢٩) وَمَا تَشَاءُونَ إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمًا (٣٠) يُدْخِلُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ فِي رَحْمَتِهِ وَالظَّالِمِينَ أَعَدَّ لَهُمْ عَذَابًا أَلِيمًا (٣١)

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Ever Merciful.

Has there passed over man a period of time when he was a thing not worthy of mention? We have created man from a drop of mingled fluid. We continued to turn it over until We made him capable of hearing and seeing. We showed him the path. It is now up to him to be grateful or ungrateful. (1-3)

We have prepared for the disbelievers chains and yokes and a blazing fire. But the loyal, they indeed will drink cups of wine flavoured with camphor, a spring near which these servants of Allah will drink and take out its channels wherever they want. They used to keep their vows and remained fearful of the Day whose horror will spread far and wide, and used to give food to the poor, the orphan and the captive in spite of being in need of it; [their motivation being:] "We are feeding you for Allah only." No reward do we desire from you nor gratitude. We dread from our Lord a Day, harsh and cruel. So Allah saved them from the affliction of that Day and bestowed them with freshness and joy, and as reward for

being patient gave them Paradise and robes of silk. They will be reclining in it on thrones and will feel neither the heat of the sun nor the cold of the winters. The shades of the orchards of Paradise will bow down over them and the clusters of their fruits will be within their easy reach. And dishes of silver and goblets of crystal will be passed around them. The crystal will be of silver which they will have very aptly arranged. (4-16)

And they will be given to drink another wine flavoured with the spring of Zanjabil. This is a spring therein called Salsabil. And they will be attended by boys who will never grow old. When you see them you will think that they are pearls scattered about. Wherever you look you will see great favours and a grand kingdom. Their outer garments will be of green silk and brocade. And they will be made to wear bracelets of silver. And their Lord will give them pure wine to drink. Indeed, this is a reward of your deeds and your effort has been accepted. (17-22)

We alone have revealed this Qur'ān to you in an elaborate manner. So with perseverance wait for the judgement of your Lord and pay no heed to any sinner or ingrate among them. And remember the name of your Lord from dawn to dusk and also prostrate yourselves before Him in the night and glorify Him till late at night. (23-26)

These people only love this transient world and ignore a burdensome Day that is to come. We alone created them and strengthened their joints and whenever We intend We will replace them in exactly the same form they are in. This is a reminder. So whoever desires he should take the path of his Lord and you will not desire until God desires. Indeed, Allah is all-knowing, wise. He admits into His mercy whomever He wishes. And for the wrongdoers, He has prepared a grievous punishment. (27-31)

Explanation

هَلْ أَتَى عَلَى الْإِنْسَانِ حِينٌ مِّنَ الدَّهْرِ لَمْ يَكُنْ شَيْئًا مَّذْكُورًا¹

Exegetes have regarded the interrogative particle هَلْ to be synonymous to the particle قَدْ. However, I could not find any corroboration of this view in classical Arabic poetry. I have deeply deliberated upon some examples which are presented in support of this view, and in my opinion in them too the particle هَلْ is used as an interrogative. However, just as interrogative particles are used in our language in different connotations, in Arabic too, they have various connotations. It is neither possible to explain all of them

1. Has there passed over man a period of time when he was a thing not worthy of mention?

here nor is there any such need. Some of their aspects have already been discussed in previous *sūrahs*, and some will come under discussion at appropriate places in the subsequent *sūrahs*. Here this much is needed to be kept in consideration that a subtle usage of an interrogative sentence is to make an addressee accept something which is a self-evident reality but he in spite of acknowledging this fact deviates from it in practice. He is not willing to accept it even though he regards it to be true. As an example of this style, consider this sentence which a mother says to her disobedient son: “Don’t you remember that you were put in my lap in the form of a lump of meat. I transformed my blood into milk and made you drink it and then looked after you until you became a mature human being.”

A little deliberation will show that these are not simple factual statements; they encompass a lot of meanings. For example:

-- they remind the son of one of the great obligations imposed on him which he is not fulfilling even though there is no room for denying it.

-- they are replete with various aspects of anger, reprimand, sorrow and express yearning.

-- they contain a real complaint and protest.

All these meanings emanate from this interrogative nature of the sentences. If these sentences are divested of their interrogative sense and converted into simple factual statements, then all these meanings will be stripped from them. Similar is the case with this verse. Its interrogative particle encompasses many meanings, which will become evident as the *sūrah* gradually unfolds itself. If the interrogative particle هَلْ is understood to convey the same meaning as قَدْ then this verse will become a very inappropriate prelude to the subjects which are subsequently raised in it.

A famous couplet from the *mu‘allaqah* reads:

هل غادر الشعراء من متردم
أم هل عرفت الدار بعد التوهم

(Did the poets leave a void in poetry or did you find the clue to the place of the beloved after your inquisitiveness?)²

This is a very exquisite opening couplet and all its beauty is concealed in its interrogative nature. If the particle هَلْ is replaced with قَدْ it will divest the couplet of this beauty. The poet while addressing himself is inquiring after the driving force behind the composition of this eulogy. Was it that some void remained in poetry which he wanted to fill or was

2. ‘Antarah ibn Shaddād, *Di#wān*, vol. 1, 172.

it the fact that the remains of the beloved's house had ignited the flame of love which wanted expression. The implication is that both these reasons were present. Indeed, the poetry was inflicted with a void that needed to be filled by this eulogy and in spite of the fact that the subject of the clue to a beloved's house has been discussed in a variety of ways and moods by poets, it was still wanting and needed more expression.

Here, the objective is not to point out the beauty of this opening couplet; the only purpose is to point out the difference between styles. The word قَدْ would also have been appropriate as far as the rhyme and meter of the couplet is concerned; however, it would have been totally deprived of such depth of meaning.

The addressees of this verse are people who disbelieved the Day of Judgement and the reward and punishment which will take place therein. They are addressed by the Qur'ān and asked whether there was not a time when man was virtually a non-entity; he was a creature that roamed in water, mud and mire. Providence made this insignificant existence pass through various stages and after training and educating him made him reach a level in which he became the best of all creatures. The purpose of this question is to induce man to reflect as to why such elaborate arrangements were made by providence for him. Why was he blessed with such great abilities? Was all this done merely so that he eats, drinks and then dies? Are not some responsibilities imposed on him as a result of being blessed with such favours? Does man not owe some obligations to the Being Who created Him? These questions should arise in every person who reflects on his existence.

Man's own being is the closest to him and every part of him induces him to reflect and ponder. The interrogative nature of the verse is meant to stimulate him towards reflection: If God is beyond man's eyes, his own being is at hand; by deliberating on it he can witness God's power and providence, mercy and justice. Similarly, if he reflects he will come to realize that although he has not seen the Day of Judgement, yet his own intuition contains signs and testimonies of such a day. In fact, so blatant are these testimonies that he cannot deny them unless of course he is absolutely stubborn.

إِنَّا خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ نُطْفَةٍ أَمْشَاجٍ نَبْتَلِيهِ فَجَعَلْنَاهُ سَمِيعًا بَصِيرًا^(٢)³

In the preceding verse, attention is directed to the bleak past man has at the beginning of his life. Here in this verse various phases of his creation

3. We have created man from a drop of mingled fluid. We continued to turn it over until We made him capable of hearing and seeing.

are alluded to, every aspect of which is before him, and which are pointing to the reality this verse is stating: man is created from a drop of a fluid; providence makes this very drop pass through various phases and stages and then fashions from it a human being who can hear, understand and use his intellect; man should reflect on this fact: how can it be difficult for the God Who has shown such superb creativity in a drop of a fluid to re-create man; he should also reflect on how the knowing and wise God Who has blessed an insignificant drop of fluid with the higher faculties of sight and hearing and also given him an awareness of good and evil would do something so meaningless as to not bring forth a Day of reward and punishment.

In the expression *مِنْ نُطْفَةٍ أَمْشَاجٍ* the word *أَمْشَاجٍ* is the plural of *مَشْجٌ* and *مَشِيجٌ*. One of its meanings is “something which is a mixture and blend”. The word *أَمْشَاجٍ* is among those words which in spite of being plural are used as an adjective for singular entities. The fact that a fertilized sperm is a blend may refer to the fact that it consists of various components and may also refer to the fact it is a blend of the sperm and ovular cells of a man and woman respectively. It should be kept in consideration that keeping a balance between various components and conflicting natures so as to produce the right result in accordance with the required objective is not possible unless the whole process is carried out under the supervision of a wise and powerful being. A chance happening cannot produce such a process replete with wisdom and sagacity.

Generally, people have taken the word *نَبَّئِلِيْهِ* to refer to the cause. Its meaning in this case would be: “We have created you to test you”. However, had it been used in this causative meaning, it should have been appended with the particle of causation: *lām*. It grammatically occurs in the form of an accusative of state (*ḥāl*), which is entirely different from the meaning of causation. In my opinion too, it is an accusative of state and means: “We created man in such a manner that We after making him gradually pass through various phases perfected him into a cognizant and discerning human being.”

The word *إِتِّبَلَاءٌ* means “to test and try out something”. When a person tests a thing he surveys it from various angles turning it over from side to side. From this meaning, the sense of passing from one phase to another was incorporated into it. Here, the word is used in this very meaning. Some exegetes have also adopted this meaning.

The various phases and stages after passing which man’s creation culminated are mentioned at various places in the Qur’ān. Following are some examples:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِن كُنْتُمْ فِي رَيْبٍ مِّنَ الْبَعْثِ فَإِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُم مِّن تُّرَابٍ ثُمَّ مِّن نُّطْفَةٍ ثُمَّ مِّن عِلْقَةٍ ثُمَّ مِّن مُّضْغَةٍ مُّخَلَّقَةٍ وَغَيْرِ مُّخَلَّقَةٍ لَّئُبَيِّنَ لَّكُمْ وَنُقَرِّ فِي الْأَرْحَامِ مَا نَشَاءُ إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى ثُمَّ نُخْرِجُكُمْ طِفْلًا ثُمَّ لِتَبْلُغُوا أَشَدَّكُمْ (٥:٢٢)

People! If you have doubts on being raised again after death, then reflect on the fact that We first created you from clay, then from a drop of water, then from a clot of blood, and then from a lump of flesh – some complete and some incomplete so that We might fully manifest to you Our power and mercy. We then make it stay in the womb as much as We want for an appointed term, and then We bring you forth as infants, then We nourish you that you reach your prime. (22:5)

In Sūrah Mu'minūn, the words are:

وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنسَانَ مِن سَلَالَةٍ مِّن طِينٍ ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَاهُ نُطْفَةً فِي قَرَارٍ مَّكِينٍ ثُمَّ خَلَقْنَا النُّطْفَةَ عَلَقَةً فَخَلَقْنَا الْعَلَقَةَ مُضْغَةً فَخَلَقْنَا الْمُضْغَةَ عِظَامًا فَكَسَوْنَا الْعِظَامَ لَحْمًا ثُمَّ أَنْشَأْنَاهُ خَلْقًا آخَرَ فَتَبَارَكَ اللَّهُ أَحْسَنُ الْخَالِقِينَ (٢٣: ١٢-١٤)

And We first created man from an essence of clay: Then placed him in the form of a drop of blood in a secure place. Then We fashioned this drop of water into a clot of blood, then made the clot of blood into a lump of flesh. Then We created bones in it and then clothed the bones with flesh, then brought it forth as an entirely new creation. So, blessed be God, the best of creators. (23:12-16)

The various phases of creation detailed in the above quoted verses are very concisely referred to in the verse under discussion. The word تَبْتَلِيهِ is used for this gradual passage from one phase to another. It is evident from this that the final product has to pass through many stages. At each stage, providence tried and tested it well as to whether the prescribed characteristics of each stage had appeared in it or not.

The words فَجَعَلْنَاهُ سَمِيعًا بَصِيرًا (until We made him capable of hearing and seeing) summarize all this grand arrangement: either man was once an insignificant thing unworthy of mention in the form of water, clay, mud and clot or there came a stage when the Almighty blessed him with the high qualities of seeing and hearing; the words “then brought it forth as an entirely new creation” of Sūrah Mu'minūn (sūrah 23) quoted above refer to this second stage.

The words سَمِيعٌ بَصِيرٌ actually symbolize all higher traits and abilities of man. It is because of these that man is able to distinguish between good

and evil and he becomes worthy of being tested by the Almighty. This test relates to whether man adopts the right path and thereby becomes a grateful person to God or deviates from it and becomes an ungrateful person who is unappreciative of the favours of God. An obvious consequence of this trial is that those who honour and value their traits and abilities should be rewarded and those who do not should be punished. If this does not happen, then what is the purpose of all these elaborate arrangements made by providence in the creation of man?

إِنَّا هَدَيْنَاهُ السَّبِيلَ إِمَّا شَاكِرًا وَإِمَّا كَفُورًا⁴

This verse mentions the consequence of granting man the faculties of hearing and sight: he was shown the right and wrong path. At another place, the words used are: (١٠:٩٠) وَهَدَيْنَاهُ النَّجْدَيْنِ (have We not shown him both paths? (90:10)). In Sūrah Shams it is said: (٨:٩١) فَأَلْهَمَهَا فُجُورَهَا وَتَقْوَاهَا (then [God] inspired it with its evil and its good, (81:9)). After being guided to these paths, man became a witness upon himself to good and evil and was left with no excuse to adopt the wrong path. The previous *sūrah* refers to this fact in the words: (٧٥:١٤-١٥) بَلِّ الْإِنْسَانَ عَلَىٰ نَفْسِهِ بَصِيرَةً وَلَوْ أَلْقَىٰ مَعَاذِيرَهُ (in fact, he himself is a witness upon his own self however much he may put up excuses.)

The words (إِمَّا شَاكِرًا وَإِمَّا كَفُورًا) (it is now up to him to be grateful or ungrateful) mention man's freedom of choice: after giving man the awareness to distinguish between good and evil, the Almighty gave him the choice to adopt whichever path he wanted. If he treads the path of virtue, he will become grateful to his Lord and will be rewarded for it, and if he treads the path of vice, he will become ungrateful and will be punished for it.

إِنَّا أَعْتَدْنَا لِلْكَافِرِينَ سَلَاسِلًا وَأَغْلَالًا وَسَعِيرًا⁵

This verse mentions the obvious consequence of man being blessed with the ability to distinguish between good and evil: when the Almighty has blessed man with this ability, He will definitely reward those who are grateful to Him, and will punish those who are ungrateful to Him. If this does not happen, then blessing him with this ability would be a useless act. But God is wise and it is against His wisdom for Him to do something meaningless.

The implication of the verse is that since the Almighty has blessed man

4. We showed him the path. It is now up to him to be grateful or ungrateful.

5. We have prepared for the disbelievers chains and yokes and a blazing fire.

with the awareness to distinguish between good and evil, hence the grateful and the ungrateful will not be treated equally by Him. For the latter, chains and yokes and a blazing fire is ready to greet them: their feet shall be put in chains and necks in iron yokes and they will be dragged towards Hell and cast into it.

إِنَّ الْأَبْرَارَ يَشْرَبُونَ مِنْ كَأْسٍ كَانَ مِزَاجُهَا كَافُورًا (٥) عَيْنًا يَشْرَبُ بِهَا عِبَادُ اللَّهِ يُفَجِّرُونَهَا تَفْجِيرًا (٦)⁶

These verses mention the fate of the grateful in contrast to that of the disbelievers mentioned in the previous verse. They are called *أَبْرَارَ* (loyal). The real meaning of *بِرٍّ* is “fulfilment of promises and trusts” and the real meaning of the word *شُكْر* is to acknowledge and discharge one’s obligation towards favours received. A clear element of commonality exists between the two words. Servants of God who acknowledge their obligation towards His favours and carry it out are the ones who should be called loyal.

The word *كَأْسٍ* is used both for a drink and the cup in which it is drunk.

The word *مِزَاجٍ* means a flavour added to temper a drink. At times, in order to reduce the intensity of the taste, smell and flavour of food and drinks, certain things are added to them at the time of consumption. In classical Arabic poetry, we find mention of such substances and other similar ones being added to wine for this purpose. In Paradise, this flavour will be taken from the sweet water from the fountain of *kāfūr*.

The word *كَافُورٌ* here does not refer to camphor, its general connotation. The Qur’ān itself has clarified that it is a spring in Paradise on whose banks its dwellers will sit and drink wine. They will add the flavour of this spring’s water to the wine and make it even more tasty and flavoursome. A question may arise here on the reason for the spring being named *kāfūr*. Though such a question should generally not arise in case of names, yet the thought does cross one’s mind that there must be some relationship between the entity and its name. This relationship is of the category of the *mutashābihāt* and only those who are fortunate enough to reach Paradise and drink from this spring will get the answer to this question.

The *بِ* in the expression *يَشْرَبُ بِهَا* is an adverb of place just as it is in the Qur’ānic expressions *يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ* and *يَخْشَوْنَ رَبَّهُم بِالْغَيْبِ*. The implication is that this fountain will be reserved for the near ones of God for their wine consumption. The word “servants of God” refer to the loyal mentioned

6. But the loyal, they indeed will drink cups of wine flavoured with camphor, a spring near which these servants of Allah will drink and take out its channels wherever they want.

earlier. It is for them that the Almighty will make such an elaborate arrangement as to reserve a fountain for their wine consumption. It may well be kept in consideration that there is a great affinity between drinking wine and drinking it on the banks of a fountain.

The word *تَفْجِيرًا* in the expression *يُفَجِّرُونَهَا تَفْجِيرًا* means to take out a lot of branches from a fountain and make a network of them. The implication is that the dwellers of Paradise will not have to travel to this fountain and any one from among them will be able to take out its branches whenever he wants to; he will be able to quench his thirst and savour his taste-buds with it without any hardship of travel.

يُوفُونَ بِالنَّذْرِ وَيَخَافُونَ يَوْمًا كَانَ شَرُّهُ مُسْتَطِيرًا⁷

Mentioned in this verse are the traits and deeds of these people which will entitle them to such reward.

The word *nadhr* refers to a self-promise made to do a good deed. The trait of these loyal people specially mentioned by the Qur'ān is fulfilment of promises. People who are so conscientious as to fulfil self-made promises can be expected to be even more conscientious regarding obligations imposed on them by God. Our exegetes have widened the scope of the word *nadhr* and included in it all virtuous acts whether imposed by a person on himself or by the Almighty on him.

It should be kept in consideration that *nadhr* (vow) has occupied great importance in all previous religions and it was rampant in pre-Islamic Arabia too. People who wanted to do a virtuous deed as *hajj*, *umrah*, animal sacrifice and spending in the way of God would make vows to do so and then would fulfil them with great fervour. The real reason among the Arabs for this was because they were un-lettered. They were not very conversant with religious rites, and for this reason the pious among them would fill this gap by making vows. After the advent of Islam, when all the principles and corollaries of religion became evident to them, the sphere of making vows was reduced. Vows which related to polytheistic practices were completely done away with. Others which burdened a person beyond his capacity were either prohibited or were reformed. Since this *sūrah* belongs to the period when people were yet to be informed on the details of the directives and etiquette of Islam, vows are specially and emphatically mentioned in it. Later, when all the *sharī'ah* had been revealed, the sphere of vows was reduced, as is mentioned earlier.

The word *مُسْتَطِيرٌ* means “wide-spread and all-embracing”. It refers to the

7. They used to keep their vows and remained fearful of the Day whose horror will spread far and wide.

degree of fear such people had of the punishment of the Hereafter which would be wide-spread and all-embracing. In other words, on that day each and every person, low or high, poor or rich, ruler or ruled and even the worshippers and their deities will have to face the horrors of that day. Only those whom the Almighty will protect will be saved from it.

وَيُطْعِمُونَ الطَّعَامَ عَلَى حُبِّهِ مِسْكِينًا وَيَتِيمًا وَأَسِيرًا⁸(٨)

This is a mention of how these people deal with their fellow human beings: they fulfil the needs of the poor, orphans and the captives while disregarding their own. The word *إِطْعَامٌ* is not used in the limited sense of providing food only. It includes providing other basic necessities of life. It is used in this broad meaning in the Qur'ān.

Generally, people have regarded the antecedent of the pronoun in *عَلَى حُبِّهِ* to be God. They interpret the verse to mean that the righteous people feed the poor and the orphans because of their love for God. Although this interpretation is grammatically possible, I, in the light of parallel verses of the Qur'ān, prefer the interpretation of those who regard this antecedent to be food. Thus, as per this interpretation, the verse means that these people give preference to the need of the poor and the orphans even though they are needy themselves.

There are various reasons for preferring this view:

Firstly, the character of the loyal people of God is being portrayed and the Qur'ān says that people who are truly loyal to God are the ones who spend in the way of God what is dearest to them; it is dear to them because it is either very valuable in itself or because they badly need it. Thus the Qur'ān says: *لَنْ تَنَالُوا الْبِرَّ حَتَّى تُنْفِقُوا مِمَّا تُحِبُّونَ* (3:92) (you shall never be truly loyal until you spend in the way of God what you dearly cherish, (3:92)). At another place, it is said: *وَيُؤْثِرُونَ عَلَى أَنْفُسِهِمْ وَلَوْ كَانَ بِهِمْ خَصَاصَةٌ* (9:59) (and they give preference to the poor and the indigent over themselves even though they are in need, (59:9)).

Secondly, in a succeeding verse, the reward of these loyal people is mentioned thus: *وَجَزَاهُمْ بِمَا صَبَرُوا جَنَّةً وَحَرِيرًا* (and as reward for being patient gave them Paradise and robes of silk.) A little deliberation will show that the real aspect which highlights their patience is that in spite of being needy themselves they feed and clothe the orphans and the poor. If the other interpretation is adopted, there is nothing in the verse which highlights their trait of patience even though the discourse entails it. This explanation automatically ascertains the antecedent of the pronoun in *عَلَى حُبِّهِ*.

8. And they used to give food to the poor, the orphan and the captive in spite of being in need for it.

Thirdly, the spending in the way of God which is from one's dear and cherished wealth and is done while sacrificing one's own needs is in fact the very one meant to please God. With regard to this, the subject of God's love automatically is raised in it.

In this verse, captives are mentioned alongside the poor and the indigent keeping in view the circumstances of those times. Captives who were arrested in those times for a crime or some investigation would generally fulfil their needs by asking people. It is evident from the statements of Qādī Abū Yūsuf that this situation remained till the time of the Abbasids. In current times, the nature of the jail punishment has changed a lot and one does not need to spend on the captives the way it was once needed; however, there are still various situations in which one may need to spend on the captives and their attendants under this very head.

إِنَّمَا نُطْعِمُكُمْ لِوَجْهِ اللَّهِ لَا نُرِيدُ مِنْكُمْ جَزَاءً وَلَا شُكُورًا (٩) إِنَّا نَخَافُ مِنْ رَبَّنَا يَوْمًا
عَبُوسًا قَمْطَرِيرًا^٩(١٠)

This is a mention of the inner motivation of their spending in the way of God.

The adjectives of عَبُوس and قَمْطَرِير are used to describe the Day of Judgement. The former means "something harsh and severe" and the latter actually has come to emphasize the intensity of the first. Such will be the harshness and cruelty of that day that no one will be able to help anyone. On that day, everyone will have to encounter the results of his deeds. The mercy of God will be earned by only those who, to earn His pleasure, had sympathized with the poor and the indigent and ignored their own needs to fulfil theirs.

This verse does not necessarily mean that this statement was uttered by the people who are helped by them. It is actually an expression of their inner motive behind spending for the cause of God only; they have nothing to drive them in this undertaking except the fear of the Hereafter.

فَوَقَّاهُمُ اللَّهُ شَرَّ ذَلِكَ الْيَوْمِ وَلَقَّاهُمْ نَضْرَةً وَسُرُورًا^{١٠}(١١)

This is a mention of their reward: since they remained fearful of a harsh and cruel day and spent in charity to protect themselves from the horrors

9. [their motivation being:] we are feeding you for Allah only. No reward do we desire from you nor gratitude. We dread from our Lord a Day, harsh and cruel.

10. So Allah saved them from the affliction of that Day and bestowed them with freshness and joy.

of that day, the Almighty will protect them from the afflictions of that day, and when all faces will be grim and desolate on that day, theirs will glow with freshness and joy.

¹¹ وَجَزَاهُمْ بِمَا صَبَرُوا جَنَّةً وَحَرِيرًا (١٢)

The words بِمَا صَبَرُوا (for being patient) refer to the patience mentioned in the earlier verse وَيُطْعَمُونَ عَلَىٰ حُبِّهِ (and they used to give food in spite of being in need of it). Only a person who is patient will give his food to others in spite of being inflicted with hunger himself.

They will be blessed with Paradise so that they can eat its fruit and benefit from its eternal bliss and will be blessed with silk so that they wear its robes. These favours include a place to live, food to eat and clothes to wear.

¹² مُتَكَبِّرِينَ فِيهَا عَلَى الْأَرَائِكِ لَا يَرَوْنَ فِيهَا شَمْسًا وَلَا زَمْهَرِيرًا (١٣)

The implication of this verse is that these people will remain secure from the hardships of heat and cold and recline on thrones. Their sun will provide light and energy to them but will not produce the heat which bothers a person. In this way, the weather in Paradise will always remain salubrious, healthy and enjoyable. They will never encounter the monotony of autumn and the cold winds of winter.

¹³ وَدَانِيَةً عَلَيْهِمْ ظِلَالُهَا وَذُلِّلَتْ قُطُوفُهَا تَذْلِيلًا (١٤)

The implication of this verse is that the dwellers of Paradise will not need to make any effort to obtain its luxuries. Everything will be readily and easily accessible to them.

¹⁴ وَيُطَافُ عَلَيْهِمْ بِآنِيَةٍ مِنْ فِضَّةٍ وَأَكْوَابٍ كَانَتْ قَوَارِيرَ (١٥) قَوَارِيرَ مِنْ فِضَّةٍ قَدَرُوهَا تَقْدِيرًا (١٦)

These utensils will appear to be made of crystal yet its substance will be of silver.

The expression قَدَرُوهَا تَقْدِيرًا refers to the fact that the cups and utensils will be made in various shapes and sizes and the attendants of Paradise

11. And as reward for being patient gave them Paradise and robes of silk.

12. They will be reclining in it on thrones and will feel neither the heat of the sun nor the cold of the winters.

13. The shades of the orchards of Paradise will bow down over them and the clusters of their fruits will be within their easy reach.

14. And dishes of silver and goblets of crystal will be passed around them. The crystal will be of silver which they will have very aptly arranged.

will have decorated various shelves with them. The purpose of all this arrangement will be that they are able to provide any set in accordance with time, circumstances and need. The word تَقْدِيرًا encompasses all these meanings, and it is difficult to find a single word to translate all these meanings.

وَيُسْقَوْنَ فِيهَا كَأْسًا كَانَ مِزَاجُهَا زَنْجَبِيلًا (١٧) عَيْنًا فِيهَا تُسَمَّى سَلْسَبِيلًا (١٨)¹⁵

Earlier verses mention the fountain of Kāfūr. These verses mention another fountain called Salsabīl. I have already referred to earlier that they do not reflect their literal meaning. The literal meaning of Zanjabīl is dry ginger; however, names are adopted because of some very minute association with their meaning. There are so many things and objects of Paradise which are mentioned in the Qur'ān; however, we are not able to ascertain the exact nature of these things through their names. It is sufficient for us that the Almighty has informed us of these names. God willing, we will be able to know the exact nature as well. Another name of this fountain is Salsabīl. In the opinion of **Zujāj**, it means is “freely flowing”. It has obviously been named thus because of the flowing nature of the fountain, which is just one of its varied features.

وَيَطُوفُ عَلَيْهِمْ وِلْدَانٌ مُخَلَّدُونَ إِذَا رَأَيْتَهُمْ حَسِبْتَهُمْ لُؤْلُؤًا مَنشُورًا (١٩)¹⁶

Mentioned in this verse are the characteristics of the boys who would attend to the dwellers of Paradise and present goblets and cups to them. There are two reasons that these boys will be graced with eternal youth: Firstly, since these attendants will be young and youthful, they will be very vigilant, efficient and enthusiastic in their service. Secondly, they will always stay the same age due to which they will be forever alert and because of remaining in service to their masters for such a long time they will become aware of their temperament, habits and taste. It may be kept in consideration that efficiency in service depends very much on experience. An old attendant has experience but he loses his vigour for work. A newly employed attendant is very enthusiastic but he lacks experience and style, and as a result can become a cause of bother for his master. In Paradise, both these deficiencies will be covered and the Almighty will provide attendants each and every ability of whose will be eternal.

15. And they will be given to drink another wine flavoured with the spring of Zanjabīl. This is a spring therein called Salsabīl.

16. And they will be attended by boys who will never grow old. When you see them you will think that they are pearls scattered about.

The words إِذَا رَأَيْتَهُمْ حَسِبْتَهُمْ لُؤْلُؤًا مَنثورًا mention their beauty, elegance and sophistication as well as them being well-dressed. Whenever one sees them, one will think that they are pearls scattered about.

وَأِذَا رَأَيْتَ تَمَّ رَأَيْتَ نَعِيمًا وَمُلْكًا كَبِيرًا (٢٠)¹⁷

These words do not need any explanation. Each part of Paradise will have blessings and regal splendour for its dwellers.

عَالِيَهُمْ ثِيَابٌ سُنْدُسٌ خُضْرٌ وَإِسْتَبْرَقٌ وَحُلُّوا أَسَاوِرَ مِنْ فِضَّةٍ وَسَقَاهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ شَرَابًا طَهُورًا (٢١)¹⁸

The word عَالِي is an adverb of place declined as an accusative of state (*hāl*) and refers to the outer garments of the dwellers of Paradise: robes and coats.

These outer garments will be made from *sundus* and *istabraq* which are the names of famous Persian silk fabrics. Some people have differentiated between the two with regard to their thickness; this research, however, is unnecessary. Here they refer to the *sundus* and *istabraq* of Paradise, whose real form is known to God only. The people of Arabia were more acquainted with Persian and Egyptian cultures; therefore, in order to delineate the blessings of Paradise, most things which belonged to these cultures have been presented before them. In those days, the kings would generally wear robes of *sundus* and *istabraq*. It is obvious that if outer garments are made of such exquisite cloths, their inner garments would be even more soft and elegant. The verses only mention the outer garments, and leaves the reader to analogously deduce what else they shall be wearing.

Consider next the expression: وَحُلُّوا أَسَاوِرَ مِنْ فِضَّةٍ (and they will be made to wear bracelets of silver). The kings of those times used to wear bracelets of gold and silver. Here mention is of bracelets of silver only; however, in Sūrah Kahf, bracelets of gold are also mentioned يُحَلِّوْنَ فِيهَا مِنْ مَّجَلِّوْنَ فِيهَا مِنْ (they shall be decked with bracelets of gold, (18:31)). Sūrah Hajj (22:23) and Sūrah Fāṭir (35:33) also mention this. This would mean that the dwellers of Paradise will be blessed with a variety of jewellery: whenever they desire they will be able to wear gold bracelets and those among them who desire silver ones will also be able to do so. Variety and difference in taste are very natural things. In Paradise, due consideration will be given to each person's taste and choice. The

17. Wherever you look you will see great favours and a grand kingdom.

18. Their outer garments will be of green silk and brocade. And they will be made to wear bracelets of silver. And their Lord will give them pure wine to drink.

following verses of Sūrah Qāf bear witness to this: لَّهُمْ مَا يَشَاءُونَ فِيهَا وَلَدَيْنَا (there they shall have all they desire, and We shall have yet more to give, (50:35)).

This is the interpretation offered by the exegetes; however, my mind also goes towards another aspect: Dwellers of Paradise will enjoy different status, as is evident from Sūrah Wāqī'ah. One category will be that of the *sābiqūn* (the foremost) and the *muqarrabūn* (the near ones) and another category will be of the *aṣḥāb al-yamīn* (companions of the right hand). It is but natural that there exist a difference in the sections of Paradise they dwell in and the favours they be blessed with. The Qur'ān has also alluded to this difference; so on the basis of this difference it is possible that the Qur'ān has mentioned silver bracelets at one place and gold ones at another.

There is a point worthy of attention in وَسَقَاهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ شَرَابًا طَهُورًا: In verse five above, the words are: إِنَّ الْأَبْرَارَ يَشْرَبُونَ مِنْ كَأْسٍ كَانَ مِزَاجُهَا كَافُورًا (the loyal, they indeed will drink cups of wine flavoured with camphor). Later, in verse seventeen, it is said: وَيُسْقَوْنَ فِيهَا كَأْسًا كَانَ مِزَاجُهَا زَنْجَبِيلًا (they will be given to drink another wine flavoured with the spring of Zanjabil) and here it is said: وَسَقَاهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ شَرَابًا طَهُورًا (and their Lord will give them pure wine to drink). Connoisseurs of the language can easily appreciate the subtle difference between the three styles of: يُسْقَوْنَ فِيهَا كَأْسًا, يَشْرَبُونَ مِنْ كَأْسٍ, and سَقَاهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ. The question is: why this difference in style? In my opinion, it signifies that the loyal will gradually come closer to God and at last reach the point when their Lord Himself will make them drink pure wine. We cannot imagine in this world what this pure wine will be like. For this reason, the Qur'ān has not compared it to something we know of the way it has in the case of the fountains of Kāfūr and Salsabīl. Only the Almighty knows what it will be like. At times, I am driven to believe that these words refer to the musk-sealed pure wine which will be reserved for the near ones of God only, and which is referred to with great emphasis in Sūrah Muṭaffifin in the following words:

يُسْقَوْنَ مِنْ رَحِيقٍ مَخْتُومٍ خَتَامُهُ مِسْكٌ وَفِي ذَلِكَ فَلْيَتَنَافَسِ الْمُتَنَافِسُونَ وَمِزَاجُهُ
مِنْ تَنْسِيمٍ عَيْنًا يَشْرَبُ بِهَا الْمُقَرَّبُونَ (٨٦: ٢٥-٢٨)

Pure wine, sealed shall be given to them to drink; the seal will be of musk. And it is for this thing, those who wish to strive, should strive with enthusiasm. And it will be mixed with *tasnīm*, a special spring on whose banks these favoured ones shall sit and drink. (86:25-28)

إِنَّ هَذَا كَانَ لَكُمْ جَزَاءً وَكَانَ سَعْيُكُمْ مَشْكُورًا (٢٢)¹⁹

The implication of this verse is that after receiving all these blessings, their Almighty will praise them in these words. The righteous will be rewarded because of their own deeds and will not need the efforts and recommendations of others to be given these favours. Concealed in these words is a slant on people who by relying on the intercession of their alleged deities remained indifferent to reward and punishment even though none of them will be of any benefit to them when the time comes.

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا عَلَيْكَ الْقُرْآنَ تَنْزِيلًا (٢٣) فَاصْبِرْ لِحُكْمِ رَبِّكَ وَلَا تُطِعْ مِنْهُمْ آثِمًا أَوْ كَفُورًا (٢٤)²⁰

These verses occur in this *sūrah* with exactly the same purpose and stress as the following verse of Sūrah Qiyāmah: لَا تُحْرَكْ بِهِ لِسَانُكَ لِتَعْجَلَ بِهِ: (١٦:٧٥) (to swiftly learn it, do not hastily move your tongue to read it, (75:16)). The purpose and stress is that once the fate of the believers and the disbelievers has been stated, the Prophet (sws) is asked to show patience and to wait for the decree of the Almighty. He should carry out his duties with perseverance and wait for God's judgement. Whatever the Qur'ān is informing these people shall necessarily manifest itself.

The verse إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا عَلَيْكَ الْقُرْآنَ تَنْزِيلًا addresses the Prophet (sws) and tells him that he has not authored the Qur'ān and presented it to people nor has he asked God to send it down to him so that it is his responsibility to prove the truths and premises it presents and to make people see the realities it presents. The fact of the matter is that it is the Almighty Who has revealed it to Him in an elaborate and profound manner. One should keep in mind the stress sounded by the words إِنَّا نَحْنُ (It is We). The implication is that when the Almighty has revealed the Qur'ān to the Prophet (sws), he should not worry about the opposition and idle talk of people. It is the responsibility of the Almighty to deal with these people and He is sufficient to do this.

The emphasis sounded by the word تَنْزِيل is that this Qur'ān is not a request put forth by its presenter nor is it something baseless which will disappear into nothingness because of the animosity of people. On the other hand, it has been comprehensively and thoroughly revealed by the Almighty. Every single word of it will come true both in this world and in that to come.

In the section of the verse فَاصْبِرْ لِحُكْمِ رَبِّكَ, the preposition ل after فَاصْبِرْ

19. Indeed, this is a reward of your deeds and your effort has been accepted.

20. We alone have revealed this Qur'ān to you in an elaborate manner. So with perseverance wait for the judgement of your Lord and pay no heed to any sinner or ingrate among them.

shows that the latter word encompasses the meaning of “wait” in it. The implication is that when the Prophet (sws) has not demanded that such a book be sent down to him, why is he worried about the objections and demands of the people; his responsibility, which he should keep on discharging, is only to communicate this Book to them and wait for the judgement of the Almighty; he should not in the least worry about the demand of these wretched and worthless people regarding being shown the punishment that the Qur’ān is warning them of. The word تُطْع here connotes “paying heed”. I have explained this shade of its meaning elsewhere. In Sūrah ‘Alaq, it has been used in this very meaning in the following verse: (كَلَّا لَا تُطْعُهُ وَاسْجُدْ وَاقْتَرِبْ (٩٦: ١٩) (do not pay heed to him and bow down in prostration and draw near, (96:19)).

Consider next the words أَثِمًّا أَوْ كَفُورًا. In verse three, occur the words شَاكِر and (إِنَّا هَدَيْنَاهُ السَّبِيلَ إِمَّا شَاكِرًا وَإِمَّا كَفُورًا: كَفُور and (كَفُورًا). Here أَثِمًّا occurs as an opposite to شَاكِر. The word أَثِمًّا is used for the person who usurps the rights of others. These rights are of two types: rights of God and rights of fellow human beings. The word كَفُورًا is used for the person who usurps the rights of God and the word أَثِمًّا is used for the person who usurps the rights of his fellow human beings. These two attributes are generally inseparable for a person who usurps the rights of his fellow human beings will never be the one who fulfils the rights of the Almighty. However, there are differences in the inclinations and proclivities of people. This malady manifests itself in people in various forms. In some, it produces stinginess, greed and callousness which make them an enemy of virtue. In some others, it produces egotism, selfishness and arrogance which stop them from bowing down before the truth. In the Quryash, we find characters of both these types in the persons of Abū Lahab and Abū Jahal respectively. Keeping both these characters in consideration come the words: وَلَا تُطْع مِنْهُمْ أَثِمًّا أَوْ: كَفُورًا and explain to the Prophet (sws) that his adversaries are of two types: either they are those caught in lust and greed of worldly pleasure and as such have become his enemies or are the ones who have been overcome by egotism which is not letting them acknowledge the truth; both these types of people are not worthy of paying heed to; their malady has no remedy.

وَاذْكُرْ اسْمَ رَبِّكَ بُكْرَةً وَأَصِيلًا (٢٥) وَمِنَ اللَّيْلِ فَاسْجُدْ لَهُ وَسَبِّحْهُ لَيْلًا طَوِيلًا (٢٦)²¹

The previous verse urges people to be patient. These verses now prescribe the way to be patient. The words “dawn to dusk” are all-

21. And remember the name of your Lord from dawn to dusk and prostrate yourselves before Him in the night and glorify Him till late at night.

encompassing and remembrance is used in the general sense and includes the daily prayers as well as various general utterances for remembering God. The words وَسَبِّحْهُ لَيْلًا طَوِيلًا (and glorify Him till late at night) refer to the *tahajjud* prayer. Details of this prayer are found in preceding *sūrahs* especially Sūrah Muzzammil.

إِنَّ هَؤُلَاءِ يُحِبُّونَ الْعَاجِلَةَ وَيَذَرُونَ وَرَاءَهُمْ يَوْمًا ثَقِيلًا (٢٧)²²

Here an assurance is sounded to the Prophet (sws) by informing him of the real malady of his opponents: these people are merely trying to cover up the reality by raising doubts on his preaching. Their real malady is that they are slaves to worldly pleasures and do not have the courage to give up these pleasures which are immediate as compared to those of the Hereafter. However hard the Day of Judgement may be, they raise some artificial objections about it in order to conceal their lust for this world. By doing so, they actually want to give the impression to their people that if they are not accepting the Prophet's message, it is not because of stubbornness and selfishness; it is rather because of some genuine reasons.

نَحْنُ خَلَقْنَاهُمْ وَشَدَدْنَا أَسْرَهُمْ وَإِذَا شِئْنَا بَدَّلْنَا أَمْثَالَهُمْ تَبْدِيلًا (٢٨)²³

This verse sounds a threat to the Prophet's adversaries as well as answers their greatest objection about the Day of Judgement: their greatest doubt mentioned in the Qur'ān is about the possibility of being recreated when they die and their remains decay into dust. The verse says that the Almighty has created them and He alone has strengthened their joints and muscles. When He has done all this, which they cannot deny, why can't He repeat this act when He wants to? When initial creation was not a bother for Him, how can it become difficult for Him a second time?

The words شَدَّ أَسْرًا mean "to strongly mould joints and tissues together" and the words بَدَّلْنَا أَمْثَالَهُمْ point to the fact that it is in the power of the Almighty to recreate these very joints and tissues they have been given in this world.

إِنَّ هَذِهِ تَذْكِرَةٌ فَمَنْ شَاءَ اتَّخَذْ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِ سَبِيلًا (٢٩)²⁴

This verse is an expression of God's self-sufficiency: This reminder

22. These people only love this world of immediate benefits and ignore a heavy Day that is to come.

23. We alone created them and strengthened their joints and whenever We intend We will replace them in exactly the same form they are in.

24. This is a reminder. So whoever wishes he should take the path of his Lord.

which is being sounded to them is merely for their own well-being and sympathy. Neither is there any personal benefit for God nor some personal motive for the Prophet (sws) in it. It is on the discretion of people to accept it and adopt the path that leads to God. Otherwise they should get ready to face the consequences this Book is informing them of.

وَمَا تَشَاءُونَ إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمًا (٣٠) يُدْخِلُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ فِي رَحْمَتِهِ
وَالظَّالِمِينَ أَعَدَّ لَهُمْ عَذَابًا أَلِيمًا (٣١)²⁵

This is a reference to the established practice of God regarding the urge a person has in embracing faith. I have explained it at various places in this *tafsīr*: All works of the Almighty are based on His knowledge and wisdom. He blesses only that person with the will and urge to seek guidance who uses his higher faculties and values his innate awareness of good and evil to which verses two and three of this *sūrah* refer. As for people who waste these abilities and become blind and deaf, they never receive guidance. For them, the Almighty has prepared Hell. They will be cast into it because they made themselves worthy of this treatment by wronging their souls. God Almighty is knowing and wise. He is never unjust to His servants.

With the grace of God, I come to the end of this *sūrah*'s *tafsīr*. فالحمد لله
على إحسانه (gratitude be to God for His favour).

Lahore,

13th February, 1979 AD

15th Rabī 'al-Awwal 1399 AH

25. And you will not wish until Allah wishes. Indeed, Allah is all-knowing, wise. He admits into His mercy whomever He wishes. And for the wrongdoers, He has prepared a grievous punishment.

Sūrah Mursalāt

Context of the *Sūrah* and Relationship with the Previous *Sūrah*

This *sūrah* resembles Sūrah Dhāriyāt of the sixth group as regards its central theme, introductory passage and line of reasoning, and resembles Sūrah Raḥmān as regards its mood and style. In Sūrah Dhāriyāt, oaths are sworn by the multifarious effects of winds to substantiate the Day of Judgement and punishment which will be meted out on that Day. The following verse of the *sūrah*: (٥١:٥-٦) **إِنَّمَا تُوعَدُونَ لَصَادِقٌ وَإِنَّ الدِّينَ لَوَاقِعٌ** (the threat of the punishment being sounded to you is true, and reward and punishment is bound to come, (51:5-6)) depicts its central theme. Similarly, in this *sūrah* too, after the multifarious effects caused by winds are presented in the form of oaths, it is stated (٧٧:٧) **إِنَّمَا تُوعَدُونَ لَوَاقِعٌ** (what you are being threatened with is certain to come, (77:7)).

Its resemblance in mood and style with Sūrah Raḥmān stems from the fact that just as the verse **فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ** (which of the favours of your Lord will you deny?) is repeated many times in that *sūrah*, similarly the verse **وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ** (devastation shall on that Day be upon those who deny) is repeated many times in this one. I have already explained in the *tafsīr* of Sūrah Raḥmān that *sūrahs* which contain repetitive verses are generally addressed to those stubborn and obdurate people who try to deny a manifest truth mainly due to arrogance and haughtiness. For such people, arguments do not suffice; it is essential that after every argument they be warned of their crime and its fate. If this nature of the addressees is not taken into consideration, then just as the medicine given by a doctor who is not aware of the temperament of a sick person is not able to cure that person, similarly, the words of a person who is not aware of the nature of his addressee fail to produce the desired result. Variation in the temperament of people is a natural thing and thus keeping this in consideration is an essential requirement of the eloquence of a discourse. People who are not aware of this aspect think such repetitive verses to be mere repetition, whereas the connoisseurs of the Qur'ān know that such repetition has great majesty and grandeur.

Its relationship with Sūrah Dahr, the previous *sūrah* relates to the basis of arguments offered. Though the subject of both *sūrahs* is the same, the nature of arguments is different. In the previous *sūrah*, it is shown that

the awareness of good and evil ordained in human nature substantiates reward and punishment; those who deny this obvious reality are warned while those who accept this testimony of their inner-self and set their lives according to it are given glad tidings. In this *sūrah*, the signs in the world around man are the basis of the arguments. If there is any allusion to human nature as a basis of argumentation, it is merely a rudimentary reference.

The mood of both *sūrahs* is very distinct. Glad tidings dominate the latter while warnings dominate this *sūrah*. The repetitive verse in this *sūrah* reflects very clearly its mood.

Analysis of the Discourse

Verses (1-7): The multifarious effects of the winds substantiate the fact that the punishment of this world and the Hereafter of which people are being warned is not something impossible. Whenever the Almighty wanted, He used His winds and clouds to punish previous nations and whenever He wants He will punish the Quraysh too through these elements. If they want to thrive, they should seek a lesson from the signs which signify the boons and banes of the Almighty. They must not dare hasten it because of their deeds.

Verses (8-15): A portrayal of the horrors of the Day of Judgement. Evident from this portrayal is that the greatest objects of this universe are not immortal; nothing can exist of its own accord and nothing is independent; everything exists because of God's decree and moves with His permission only. A day will come when the Almighty will destroy the heavens and the earth and all that is between them. On that day, the accounts of the messengers and their people will be presented. It will be a very important day. Judgement will be passed on that day regarding what the messengers told their people and how these people behaved with them. On that day, people who rejected their messengers will be devastated.

Verses (16-19): The Quraysh are asked to seek a lesson from their history by asking them about it; The Almighty destroyed previous nations and the succeeding ones too who followed their ways. If this is an established and irrefutable fact, how can God's practice regarding criminals change?

Verses (20-24): A reference to God's power, providence and wisdom by depicting the physical structure of man and his various phases of creation. The purpose of this mention is that man's own creation bears testimony that re-creating him is not at all difficult for His Creator. Mankind shall definitely be raised to life once again. Those who are insisting on denying this will be doomed on that day.

Verses (25-28): Those who live and die, do so on the earth created by

God. The Almighty has made available in it the means of their sustenance. Neither is anyone beyond God's control nor is anyone self-sufficient from His sustenance. This situation bears testimony that one day the Almighty will necessarily gather all people. Cursed will be those on that day who did not acknowledge His providence and power in this world; they while remaining inebriated by the pleasures of life kept on denying the Day of Judgement.

Verses (29-34): A portrayal of the torment that these disbelievers will face in the Hereafter.

Verses (35-40): A depiction of the helplessness of the disbelievers.

Verses (41-45): A portrayal of the success attained by those who were fearful of the Almighty.

Verses (46-50): A declaration of warning to the Quraysh on their arrogance and an expression of hopelessness on their embracing faith.

Text and Translation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَالْمُرْسَلَاتِ غُرَفًا (١) فَالْعَاصِفَاتِ عَصْفًا (٢) وَالتَّائِشِرَاتِ نَشْرًا (٣) فَالْفَارِقَاتِ فَرَقًا (٤)
 فَالْمُلْقِيَاتِ ذِكْرًا (٥) عُذْرًا أَوْ نُذْرًا (٦) إِنَّمَا تُوعَدُونَ لَوَاقِعَ (٧) فَإِذَا التَّجُومُ طُمِسَتْ (٨)
 وَإِذَا السَّمَاءُ فُرِجَتْ (٩) وَإِذَا الْجِبَالُ نُسِفَتْ (١٠) وَإِذَا الرُّسُلُ أُقِتَتْ (١١) لِأَيِّ يَوْمٍ أُجِّلَتْ
 (١٢) لِيَوْمِ الْفَصْلِ (١٣) وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا يَوْمِ الْفَصْلِ (١٤) وَيَلَّ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ (١٥) أَلَمْ
 نُهْلِكِ الْأَوَّلِينَ (١٦) ثُمَّ نُنَبِّعُهُمُ الْآخِرِينَ (١٧) كَذَلِكَ نَفْعَلُ بِالْمُجْرِمِينَ (١٨) وَيَلَّ يَوْمَئِذٍ
 لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ (١٩) أَلَمْ نَخْلُقْكُمْ مِنْ مَاءٍ مَهِينٍ (٢٠) فَجَعَلْنَاهُ فِي قَرَارٍ مَكِينٍ (٢١) إِلَى قَدَرٍ
 مَعْلُومٍ (٢٢) فَقَدَرْنَا فَنِعْمَ الْقَادِرُونَ (٢٣) وَيَلَّ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ (٢٤) أَلَمْ نَجْعَلِ الْأَرْضَ
 كِفَاتًا (٢٥) أَحْيَاءً وَأَمْوَاتًا (٢٦) وَجَعَلْنَا فِيهَا رَوَاسِيَ شَاخِجَاتٍ وَأَسْقَيْنَاكُمْ مَاءً فُرَاتًا (٢٧)
 وَيَلَّ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ (٢٨) انْظِلُّوا إِلَى مَا كُنْتُمْ بِهِ تُكَذِّبُونَ (٢٩) انْظِلُّوا إِلَى ظِلٍّ ذِي
 ثَلَاثِ شُعَبٍ (٣٠) لَا ظَلِيلٍ وَلَا يُغْنِي مِنَ اللَّهَبِ (٣١) إِنَّهَا تَرْمِي بِشَرِّ رَآلِقَصْرِ (٣٢) كَأَنَّهُ
 جِمَالَةٌ صُفْرٌ (٣٣) وَيَلَّ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ (٣٤) هَذَا يَوْمٌ لَا يَنْطِقُونَ (٣٥) وَلَا يُؤْدُنُ لَهُمْ
 فَيْعَتُهُمْ (٣٦) وَيَلَّ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ (٣٧) هَذَا يَوْمُ الْفَصْلِ جَمْعَنَاكُمْ وَالْأَوَّلِينَ (٣٨)
 فَإِنْ كَانَ لَكُمْ كَيْدٌ فَكِيدُوا (٣٩) وَيَلَّ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ (٤٠) إِنَّ الْمُتَّقِينَ فِي ظِلَالٍ
 وَعُيُونٍ (٤١) وَقَوَاقِهِ مِمَّا يَشْتَهُونَ (٤٢) كُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا هَنِيئًا بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ (٤٣) إِنَّا

كَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ (٤٤) وَيُلْ يُومِئِدِ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ (٤٥) كَلُوا وَتَمَتَّعُوا قَلِيلًا إِنَّكُمْ
مُجْرِمُونَ (٤٦) وَيُلْ يُومِئِدِ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ (٤٧) وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ ارْكَعُوا لَا يَرْكَعُونَ (٤٨) وَيُلْ
يَوْمِئِدِ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ (٤٩) فَبِأَيِّ حَدِيثٍ بَعْدَهُ يُؤْمِنُونَ (٥٠)

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Ever Merciful.

The winds when their reins are let loose bear witness, then they blow dust all over, and the winds which scatter [the clouds], then settle affairs separately, then instil a reminder to leave no justification for some or to inform some, bear witness that indeed the promise which is being made with you is certain to be fulfilled. (1-7)

So when the stars are dimmed, the sky is cleft asunder, the mountains crumble into dust and time is appointed for the prophets – for what day were they deferred? – for the Day of Judgement. And what do you know what this Day of Judgement is? Devastation shall on that Day be upon those who deny. (8-15)

Have We not destroyed those before them? Then have We not continued to put their successors behind them? Thus do We deal with criminals. Destruction shall on that Day be upon those who deny. (16-19)

Have We not created you from an insignificant fluid? Then We placed it in a safe abode till an appointed time? Thus did We estimate; how excellently do We estimate! Demolition shall on that Day be upon those who deny. (20-24)

Have We not made this earth one which accumulates the living and the dead? And firmly placed upon it high mountains and provided for you sweet water? – Destruction shall on that Day be upon those who deny. (25-28)

Proceed now to that which you used to deny. Proceed to the shade which has three branches. It does not provide shade or protection from the flames. That fire, it will emit sparks like huge castles – as if they were like yellow camels – Demolition shall on that Day be upon those who deny. (29-34)

That Day will be one in which none will speak and nor will they be allowed to offer excuses. Devastation shall on that Day be upon those who deny. (35-37)

This is the Day of Judgement. We have gathered you and all those before you. Now if you have a scheme to plot against Me, then do so. Devastation shall on that Day be upon those who deny. (38-40)

Indeed, the God-fearing will be amid shades and springs and in the bliss of fruits they desire. Eat and drink with relish as reward for your deeds. Thus do We reward the well-doers. Devastation shall on that Day be upon those who deny. (41-45)

You may eat and enjoy also for a while; you are the wrongdoers. Devastation shall on that Day be upon those who deny. (46-47)

And when they are asked to kneel before their Lord they do not do so. Devastation shall on that Day be upon those who deny. (48-49)

So what is it after this that they are going to believe? (50)

Explanation

وَالْمُرْسَلَاتِ عُزْفًا¹

The word مُرْسَلَاتٌ means “those which are let loose”. Here it is used to signify winds. Although some people interpret it to signify angels, attributes mentioned later are inappropriate to describe angels. The basis of this erroneous interpretation is that an oath is sworn here and it is generally believed that oaths are always sworn by sacred entities. I have pointed out at various places in this *tafsīr* that most oaths in the Qur’ān are meant to substantiate a claim. The oath sworn in this verse is no different. Just as in Sūrah Dhāriyāt, oaths have been sworn by winds to substantiate reward and punishment, this oath has also been sworn to substantiate that the punishment of this world and of the next is certain to come if the disbelievers persist in denying the truth.

The word عُزْفٌ comes for a horse’s mane which hangs from the forehead. It is very commonly used in this meaning. Imru’ al-Qays has said:

نمش بأعراف الجياد اكفنا
إذا نحن قمنا عن شواء مضهَّب

(when we would get up after eating half-cooked food of the prey, we would wipe our hands from the manes of horses.)²

A horse’s mane is used both to stop it and to give it a signal to cut loose. In this verse, winds are compared to horses and letting them loose signifies letting loose their mane. This portrayal is very subtle. The purpose is to highlight the fact that winds cannot act independently and cannot do something of their own accord; they are in God’s control. Whenever He wants, He stops them and whenever He wants, He lets them loose. In Sūrah Hūd, it is said: مَا مِنْ دَابَّةٍ إِلَّا هُوَ آخِذٌ بِنَاصِيَتِهَا (٥٦:١١) (there is not a living creature on the earth whose forelock is not in His hands, (11:56)).

1. The winds when their reins are let loose bear witness.

2. Imru’ al-Qays, *Dīwān*, 16.

فَالْعَاصِفَاتِ عَصْفًا (٢)³

The word عَصْفٌ means “to blow all over in an uncontrolled manner”. In Sūrah Yūnus it is said: حَتَّىٰ إِذَا كُنْتُمْ فِي الْفُلِّ وَجَرْنَ بِيَمٍ يَبْرِجَ طَيْبَةً وَفَرِحُوا بِهَا (until when you are on the ships and they set sail, rejoicing in a favourable wind, suddenly a raging tempest overtakes them and waves embrace them from all sides, (10:22)).

This is the second phase in which after being let loose, winds blow in an unrestrained manner. This obviously refers to tempestuous winds which become a torment and destroy complete nations. The Qur’ān has recorded the history of their multifarious effects and even today one can observe the devastation they cause.

وَالنَّاشِرَاتِ نَشْرًا (٣)⁴

The word نَشْرٌ means “to scatter, to sprinkle, to bring forth and to cause to grow”. It is used in all these meanings in the Qur’ān. Here it refers to winds which bring forth clouds beneficial to man because there are various aspects of نَشْرٌ found in these winds. They bring forth clouds and then scatter them, then sprinkle God’s mercy and then cause vegetation to grow and thereby make the earth luxuriant. At another place in the Qur’ān, it is said: وَهُوَ الَّذِي يُنَزِّلُ الْغَيْثَ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا قَنَطُوا وَيَنْشُرُ رَحْمَتَهُ (٢٨:٤٢) (and it is He who sends down the rain after people have lost all hope, and spreads His mercy, (42:28))

As indicated earlier, the previous oath relates to tempestuous winds, while this one relates to winds which bring clouds of mercy on which is dependent the existence and nourishment of various life forms.

An important linguistic principle that needs to be kept in consideration here is that co-ordinating the word الْعَاصِفَاتِ by the particle ف to the word الْمُرْسَلَاتِ signifies sequential order. This verse is coordinated with the previous one by the word وَ, which shows that it does not refer to a third phase in the sequence; it rather refers to an independent new category of winds.

فَالْفَارِقَاتِ فَرْقًا (٤)⁵

What is said here is no different to what is said in Sūrah Dhāriyāt by the words فَالْمُقَسَّمَاتِ أَمْرًا (٥١:٤) which refers to the fact that these winds

3. Then they blow dust all over.

4. And these winds which scatter [the clouds].

5. Then settle affairs separately.

distinguish between affairs; at times, they bring forth clouds and, at times, have them blown away; at one place, they cause abundant rain from these clouds and leave another place dry and desolate. This bears testimony to the fact that they are not independent in their actions; they are subservient to some superior power. Since this distinction made by winds occurs after they scatter clouds, the co-ordinated particle is ف.

فَالْمُلْكِيَّاتِ ذِكْرًا⁶

The implication is that besides rain, the winds also instil a reminder in people.

The Qur'ān at various places has mentioned several things of which rain is instrumental in reminding and I have already explained these aspects. Here I would like to allude to a few prominent features:

- With respect to the harmony between the sky and the earth, rain reminds us of God's *tawhīd* and of showing gratitude to Him.
- the majesty of God's providence found in rain reminds us of our accountability to God.
- By enlivening dead and desolate pieces of land, rain reminds us of raising the dead to life in the Hereafter.
- By bringing mercy to some and misery to some, rain reminds us of God's absolute authority and His reward and punishment.

عُذْرًا أَوْ نُذْرًا⁷

Mentioned in this verse is the objective of the various effects of winds which are observed by every person. The implication of the particle أَوْ (or) is that no justification is left for people who want to remain inebriated with indifference while those who want to be reminded are afforded an opportunity to be reminded. In Sūrah A'rāf, a remark of a group of the righteous is mentioned which throws light on what is stated in this verse:

وَإِذْ قَالَتْ أُمَّةٌ مِّنْهُمْ لِمَ تَعِظُونَ قَوْمًا اللَّهُ مُهْلِكُهُمْ أَوْ مُعَذِّبُهُمْ عَذَابًا شَدِيدًا قَالُوا مَعذِرَةٌ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكُمْ وَلَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَّقُونَ (١٦٤:٧)

When a group from among them asked: "What is the use of counselling a people whom God will destroy or sternly punish?" They replied: "So that we may be free from blame in the sight of your Lord, and also that they may fear." (7:164)

6. Then instil a reminder.

7. To leave no justification for some or to inform some.

The implication of the above verse is that if these people pay no heed to the counsel of the righteous, then at least the latter will have discharged their duty. It was now up to the people to accept or reject it and they are left with no excuse which they can present on the Day of Judgement; if, on the other hand, these people after paying heed to the counsel of the righteous are instilled with God's fear, then this was precisely what was intended. It will bring blessings to both.

إِنَّمَا تُوعَدُونَ لَوَاقِعٌ⁸ (٧)

This is the complement of all the oaths mentioned earlier. The word *تُوعَدُونَ* is general and includes both promises and threats. Since this *sūrah* is primarily meant to warn the disbelievers, as indicated earlier, the element of threat dominates this word here. The implication is that the torment and punishment with which people are being threatened is certain to come and the disbelievers are bound to face it.

The various aspects through which the effects produced by winds bear witness to the Hereafter and the punishment that will take place on that day are mentioned in previous *sūrahs*. Readers can look up the *tafsīr* of Sūrah Dhāriyāt for details. Here it would suffice to keep in mind that the Almighty has warned the rejecters of punishment and of the Hereafter by directing their attention to the effects of the winds: they should not be proud of their power and grandeur. If He wants to punish a people, He does not require much effort. The very rain which brings life to people can cause devastation to them in no time. Many a nation has been totally ravaged by the Almighty through these winds.

فَإِذَا التُّجُومُ طُمِسَتْ (٨) وَإِذَا السَّمَاءُ فُرِجَتْ (٩) وَإِذَا الْجِبَالُ نُسِفَتْ (١٠)⁹

Depicted in these verses is the upheaval of the Day of Judgement: on that day, every object of this universe which appears very grand and great, immortal and abiding, firm and solid will be wrecked. Just as one has seen tempestuous winds destroy huge cities, castles and palaces, similarly on that day such a cataclysm will take place that stars will vanish into nothingness, the sky will be cleft asunder and the mountains will crumble into dust.

The verb *طَمَسَ* means “to erase something and obliterate something”. In

8. Bear witness that indeed the promise which is being made with you is certain to be fulfilled.

9. So when the stars are dimmed, the sky is cleft asunder, the mountains crumble into dust.

Sūrah Nisā', a verse reads: (٤٧:٤) مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ نَنْطِيسَ وَجُوهَهَا فَتَرَدَّهَا عَلَىٰ أَذْبَارِهَا (before We obliterate faces and turn them backwards, (4:47)).

At other places, the words are: (٨١:٢) وَإِذَا التُّجُومُ انْكَدَرَتْ and (٨٢:٢) وَإِذَا الْكُوَاكِبُ انْتَثَرَتْ.

The implication of the verse وَإِذَا السَّمَاءُ فُرِجَتْ is that the sky which has no fissures and crevices and is absolutely sound and solid will be cleft asunder on the Day of Judgement. At another place, the words are: (٧٨:١٩) وَفُتِحَتِ السَّمَاءُ فَكَانَتْ أَبْوَابًا (and the sky is flung open and therein appear gates all over, (78:19)). Similarly, in Sūrah Infitār the words are: (٨٢:١) إِذَا السَّمَاءُ انْفَطَرَتْ (When the sky is rent asunder, (82:1)).

The word دَسَفَ in the verse وَإِذَا الْجِبَالُ نُسِفَتْ means "to crush to pieces, to mash and to scatter". This word has been used at a number of places in the Qur'ān. For example, it is said : (٢٠:٩٧) وَانْظُرْ إِلَىٰ إِلَهِكَ الَّذِي ظَلْتَ عَلَيْهِ عَاكِفًا لَنُحَرِّقَنَّهُ ثُمَّ لَنَنْسِفَنَّهُ فِي الْيَمِّ نَسْفًا (Behold this idol which you have served with such devotion we will burn it to ashes and scatter them all over the sea, (20:97)). The objection raised by the rejecters of the Day of Judgement has been replied to by the Qur'ān thus: (١٠٥:١٠٦-١٠٦) وَبَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْجِبَالِ فَقُلْ يَنْسِفُهَا رَبِّي نَسْفًا فَيَذَرُهَا قَاعًا صَفْصَفًا (and they ask you about the mountains. Tell [them]: "My Lord will crush them to fine dust and leave the earth absolutely clean," (20:105-106)).

At some other places, it is said that on the Day of Judgement, the mountains will be reduced to sand dunes and will appear like a mirage.

In the previous two verses, the fate the sky will meet is described. In this verse, what will happen to the earth is depicted. Among the objects of the earth, the mountains are the most grand and sturdy; their expanse is also matchless. Consequently, when the disbelievers would make fun of the Day of Judgement, they would ask: What would become of the mountains; will they also be destroyed? Here by portraying the fate of the mountains, it is as if the fate the whole earth will meet is depicted. When such gigantic structures as mountains which people regard as eternal will be destroyed, there is no need to mention what will happen to other things of the earth.

وَإِذَا الرُّسُلُ أُقِيتَتْ¹⁰ (١١)

This is a mention of the real horror to which all other horrors are mentioned as a prelude. The purpose of fixing a time for the appearance of the prophets shows that they while presenting themselves before the Almighty at an appointed time and in the presence of their people they should tell whether they fulfilled their responsibility of *indhār* or not. If they did, what was the response of their people? At other places in the

10. And time is appointed for the prophets.

Qur'ān, it is mentioned in detail how prophets will be called for this purpose and the attitude of their people will be inquired after and how they will bear witness before these people. A verse in Sūrah Mā'idah reads thus: (يَوْمَ يَجْمَعُ اللَّهُ الرُّسُلَ فَيَقُولُ مَاذَا أُجِبْتُمْ قَالُوا لَا عِلْمَ لَنَا إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ عَلَّامُ الْغُيُوبِ) (109:5). (One day God will gather all the messengers and ask them: "How were you received?" They will reply: "We have no knowledge. You alone know what is hidden," (5:109). People can look up its *tafsīr*. Here the reference is precisely the same. On that day, the case of the prophets and their people will be given a hearing. The Almighty will appoint a day for the appearance of the prophets and their respective people will also be summoned. More details can be seen in the following verse:

فَلَنَسْأَلَنَّ الَّذِينَ أُرْسِلَ إِلَيْهِمْ وَلَنَسْأَلَنَّ الْمُرْسَلِينَ فَلَنَقُصَّنَّ عَلَيْهِمْ بِعِلْمٍ وَمَا كُنَّا غَائِبِينَ (7:6-7)

We will surely question those to whom the messengers were sent, and We will question the messengers themselves. With knowledge We will recount to them what they have done, for We were never away from them. (7:6-7)

The word أَقَتَّتْ is actually a changed form of وَقَّتَتْ. In the Arabic language, such changes in the morphological structure of a word are customary. The expression الرُّسُلُ أَقَتَّتْ means that time will be appointed for the prophets. This is similar to the expression أَبْغَيْنِي خَادِمًا which is actually أَنْبِغِ لِي خَادِمًا.

لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا يَوْمَ أَجَلْتِ (١٢) لِيَوْمِ الْفَصْلِ (١٣)¹¹

When the discourse reached a point in which the Day of Judgement was alluded to, the question mentioned in this verse was posed to the disbelievers: Have they understood the great day for which the appearance of the prophets has been deferred? The Qur'ān itself then answers this question by saying that they should take note that this appearance was deferred for the Day when Judgement shall be passed.

وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا يَوْمُ الْفَصْلِ (١٤)¹²

This style of discourse is meant to express the awe and greatness of something, as has been explained at a number of places in this *tafsīr*. Just as the question raised in the previous verses highlights the eminence of

11. – For what day were they deferred? – for the Day of Judgement.

12. And what do you know what this Day of Judgement is?

the Day of Judgement, the question raised in this verse highlights the eminence of the Judgement which shall be passed on that day. It is like a reminder of that day's greatness.

وَيُلْ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ (١٥)¹³

The verse depicts the result of the Judgement which will be passed on that day for the disbelievers. This verse, as I have indicated earlier, has been repeated in this *sūrah* many times and in spite of having a deep connection with its previous verse, has an independent status. Some people have regarded it to be the answer to the condition stated earlier. However, this opinion is against linguistic principles of Arabic. Had this been the case, this verse should have begun with the particle ف. Thus for example in Sūrah Muddaththir it is said: فَإِذَا فَعَلَيْكَ يَوْمَ عَسِيرٍ (٧٤: ٨-٩). Similarly, the words in Sūrah Tūr are: يَوْمَ تَمُورُ السَّمَاءُ مَوْرًا وَتَسِيرُ. الجِبَالُ سَيْرًا قَوْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ (٥٢: ٩-١١). I have explained this principle because it would be erroneous to interpret this sentence by regarding it to be an answer to the conditional sentences. Here, actually an ellipsis of the answer has occurred, just as it has occurred in the following verses:

إِذَا السَّمَاءُ انشَقَّتْ وَأَذْنَتْ لِرَبِّهَا وَحُقَّتْ وَإِذَا الْأَرْضُ مُدَّتْ وَأَلْقَتْ مَا فِيهَا وَتَخَلَّتْ
وَأَذْنَتْ لِرَبِّهَا وَحُقَّتْ يَا أَيُّهَا الْإِنْسَانُ إِنَّكَ كَادِحٌ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ كَدْحًا فَمُلَاقِيهِ (٨٤: ١-٦)

As a result of this ellipsis, the verse has become so comprehensive that it occurs at the end of each paragraph of this *sūrah* and at each instance has a specific status.

أَلَمْ نُهْلِكِ الْأَوَّلِينَ (١٦) ثُمَّ نُنَبِّئُهُمُ الْآخِرِينَ (١٧) كَذَلِكَ نَفْعَلُ بِالْمُجْرِمِينَ (١٨) وَيُلْ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ (١٩)¹⁴

This is a historical corroboration of the promise mentioned earlier by the words: “what you are being threatened with is certain to come.” The reference obviously is to the people of Noah (sws), to the ‘Ād and to the Thamūd and to nations of other prophets who followed them the details of which are found in the Qur’ān at other places. These include the people of Lot (sws), Midyan and the people of the Pharaoh. The

13. Devastation shall on that Day be upon those who deny.

14. Have We not destroyed those before them? Then have We not continued to put their successors behind them? Thus do We deal with criminals. Devastation shall on that Day be upon those who deny.

implication is that when history bears witness to the fact that the Almighty destroyed all nations which denied the warnings of their respective messengers, then will His practice change today for these criminals who are following the ways of their predecessors?

An incomplete verb is suppressed in the verse: *ثُمَّ نُنْبِئُهُمُ الْآخِرِينَ*. If this verse is translated keeping in view this suppression, it would mean: “Have We not been continuously putting those who followed their predecessors behind them.” This persistent practice of the Almighty shows that it is unalterable. This is what happened in the past and this is what will happen in the future. Moreover, this relentless practice of the Almighty also bears evidence to the fact that the day of which the messengers of God have warned their people is certain to come.

Although the verse *كَذَلِكَ نَفْعَلُ بِالْمُجْرِمِينَ* states a general principle, it specifically refers to the fact that the Almighty will also deal with the Quraysh in a similar manner. If they do not desist from their stubbornness, their fate will be no different on the Day of Judgement than that of other criminals. The law of God is the same for all.

After this, the verse *وَيُلْ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ* is repeated. Its placement and occasion are absolutely clear. The word *وَيُلْ* encompasses in it all forms of punishment which will be encountered by the criminals on the Day of Judgement and which have been mentioned in the Qur’ān. Though it is apparently a very short word, concealed in its brevity is such horror that cannot be encompassed by the most elaborate of details.

أَلَمْ نَخْلُقْكُمْ مِنْ مَّاءٍ مَهِينٍ (٢٠) فَجَعَلْنَاهُ فِي قَرَارٍ مَكِينٍ (٢١) إِلَىٰ قَدَرٍ مَّعْلُومٍ (٢٢)
فَقَدَرْنَا فَنِعْمَ الْقَادِرُونَ (٢٣) وَيُلْ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ (٢٤)¹⁵

The previous verses presented historical evidence. These verses present evidence drawn from the creation of man. The Qur’ān draws evidence on the Day of Judgement from the creation of man in various ways:

- By referring to man’s creation from mud and from a drop of fluid, evidence is drawn on the fact that the Day of Judgement is a possible phenomenon.
- The signs of God’s power, wisdom and creativity in the creation of man entail that a Day of Judgement must come.
- The tremendous system of man’s sustenance elaborately set up by the Almighty also entails that a Day of Judgement must come.

15. Have We not created you from an insignificant fluid? Then We placed it in a safe abode till an appointed time? Thus did We estimate; how excellently do We estimate! Demolition shall on that Day be upon those who deny.

– The innate awareness about good and evil found in a person bears evidence that a Day of Judgement must come.

Although all these arguments are found at various places in the whole corpus of the Qur’ān, if one takes a look at Sūrah Qiyāmah and Sūrah Dahr, all these arguments will be found in them and one may not need to look in other places.

The verses: *أَلَمْ نَخْلُقْكُمْ مِنْ مَّاءٍ مَهِينٍ فَجَعَلْنَاهُ فِي قَرَارٍ مَكِينٍ إِلَى قَدَرٍ مَعْلُومٍ* (have We not created you from an insignificant fluid? Then We placed it in a safe abode till an appointed time?) answer an objection raised by the rejecters of the Day of Judgement: they expressed their wonder at being created again once their bones decay and decompose into nothingness. The implication is that when no one can deny such an obvious reality as man being created from an insignificant fluid, then how can it be impossible for God to re-create man once he dies and his body also crumbles into dust.

The word *مَهِينٌ* means “insignificant and frivolous”. This word points to the fact that man has not been created from something rare and uncommon so that re-creating him becomes a difficult task. He is created from a trivial and ordinary thing found in abundance in nature. The second objective of using this word is to show that the God whose profound and matchless power can create a human being from a fluid is not powerless to re-create him.

The verse *فَجَعَلْنَاهُ فِي قَرَارٍ مَكِينٍ* (then We placed it in a safe abode till an appointed time) refers to the amazing changes which come about in the fluid as it passes through various stages and reaches its culmination. The word *قَرَارٌ* means “rest” and “place of rest”. Here it refers to the latter and the reference is to the womb which has been appointed as a place of safety for this very purpose. When the word *مَكِينٌ* is used as an adjective for a place, it refers to a place which is secure from hazards, dangers and undue interventions.

The verse *إِلَى قَدَرٍ مَعْلُومٍ* (till an appointed time) refers to the fact that the fluid is placed in a secure place till an appointed time so that whatever potential is destined to appear in it is given the opportunity. It is then God’s power and might which brings it out from this place once this time expires.

In the verse *فَقَدَرْنَا فَنِعْمَ الْقَادِرُونَ* the first word is from *قدر* and the second from *قدرة*.¹⁶ After directing attention to various signs and manifestations

16. There seems to be a contradiction between the *tafsīr* and translation of the second *قدر*. The author has translated it in the same meaning as the first; however, while doing *tafsīr*, he has explained the first and second to have different meanings. (Translator)

of God's power, it is said that man should see what miracles and wonders have been worked by God and how great and grand His power is. The implication is that when such great signs of God's power and creativity are evident in man's creation, then it is not impossible for Him to re-create man.

After this, the recurring verse وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ is meant to dispel their doubts about being re-created; their own creation is enough to dismiss this rejection. This they shall one day witness with their own eyes and on that day devastation shall be on those who deny. In Sūrah Ṣāffāt, the words are:

فَإِنَّمَا هِيَ زَجْرَةٌ وَاحِدَةٌ فَإِذَا هُمْ يَنْظُرُونَ وَقَالُوا يَا وَيْلَنَا هَذَا يَوْمُ الدِّينِ هَذَا يَوْمُ
الْفَصْلِ الَّذِي كُنْتُمْ بِهِ تُكَذِّبُونَ (٣٧: ١٩-٢١)

It shall be just one blast when they shall suddenly see around and shall say: "Woe betide us! This is the Day of Judgement which you had been denying." (37:19-21)

أَلَمْ نَجْعَلِ الْأَرْضَ كِفَاتًا (٢٥) أَحْيَاءَ وَأَمْوَاتًا (٢٦) وَجَعَلْنَا فِيهَا رَوَاسِيَ شَاخِحَاتٍ
وَأَسْقَيْنَاكُمْ مَاءً فُرَاتًا (٢٧) وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ (٢٨)¹⁷

These verses substantiate the Day of Judgement referred to above by mentioning the blessings granted by the Almighty in this world for the sustenance and nourishment of man. This argument has been presented at various places in the Qur'ān and I have been explaining it all along. In short, it can be stated thus: The elaborate arrangement made by the Almighty for looking after and nurturing man and the manner in which He has put the heavens and the earth in the service of man for this purpose shows that man shall definitely be held accountable for his deeds; this accountability is a natural outcome of these blessings; he shall one day be asked whether he fulfilled his obligations towards these blessings or not, and then he who did will be rewarded and he who became arrogant and haughty will be punished for this ingratitude.

The word كَفَّت in verse أَلَمْ نَجْعَلِ الْأَرْضَ كِفَاتًا means "to gather and to bring together". In Arabic, the فَعَال form (*wazan*) also comes for the object from which an action emanates. Thus the word كِفَاتًا would mean "one that gathers". As regards its meaning, it becomes a potential subject

17. Have We not made this earth one which accumulates the living and the dead? And firmly placed upon it high mountains and provided for you sweet water? – Destruction shall on that Day be upon those who deny.

(*fā'il*) and it is grammatically correct to bring an object (*maf'ūl*) after it.

Here the Hereafter and reward and punishment are substantiated on the basis of providence and the all-embracing nature of this earth. In the succeeding *sūrah*, which is the counterpart of this *sūrah*, the arguments drawn from providence are more detailed. It is said:

أَلَمْ نَجْعَلِ الْأَرْضَ مِهَادًا وَالْجِبَالَ أَوْتَادًا وَخَلَقْنَاكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا وَجَعَلْنَا نَوْمَكُمْ سُبَاتًا
وَجَعَلْنَا اللَّيْلَ لِبَاسًا وَجَعَلْنَا النَّهَارَ مَعَاشًا وَبَنَيْنَا فَوْقَكُمْ سَبْعًا شِدَادًا وَجَعَلْنَا سِرَاجًا
وَهَاجًا وَأَنْزَلْنَا مِنَ الْمُعْصِرَاتِ مَاءً ثَجَّاجًا لِّنُخْرِجَ بِهِ حَبًّا وَنَبَاتًا وَجَنَّاتٍ أَلْفَافًا إِنَّ يَوْمَ
الْفَصْلِ كَانَ مِيقَاتًا (٧٨: ٦-١٧)

Have We not made the earth a cradle and made the mountains pegs? And not created you in pairs? And not made your sleep a means of comfort? And not made the night a covering and the day a time to earn livelihood? And not built above you seven sturdy skies? And not placed in them a glowing lamp? And not sent down abundant water from dripping clouds so that We may bring forth grain and vegetation and gardens of luxurious growth? Indeed, the Day of Judgement has an appointed time. (78:6-17)

To refer to the all-embracing aspect, the dead are also mentioned with the living. Just as this earth embraces all living creatures, it also embraces all the dead. Those who die, do not go beyond it; they are buried in it; The Almighty entrusts them to the earth which is like a cradle to them in which they are born and in which they grow. This elaborate arrangement has been made so that when the time comes to gather all, the earth will be directed to present what had been entrusted to it; indeed, it will carry out this order. Thus the words in Sūrah Inshiqāq are: (٨٤: ٣-٤) وَإِذَا الْأَرْضُ مُدَّتْ وَأَلْقَتْ مَا فِيهَا وَتَخَلَّتْ and when the earth is stretched out and casts out all things within her and becomes empty, (84:3-4)). To this very aspect, the following verse of Sūrah Zilzāl bears reference: (٩٩: ٢) وَأُخْرِجَتِ الْأَرْضُ أَنْقَالَهَا (and the earth shall cast forth its burdens, (99:2)). Evident from these verses is the fact that he who dies is not destroyed; he is given in the custody of the earth. Whenever the Almighty wants, He will raise all creatures from this earth from which they had been originally created. Consequently, it is said in Sūrah Tāha: (٢٠: ٥٥) مِنْهَا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ وَفِيهَا نُعِيدُكُمْ وَمِنْهَا نُخْرِجُكُمْ تَارَةً أُخْرَى (We have created you from the earth, and to the earth will We return you; and from it We will bring you back for a second time, (20:55)).

If all these verses are deliberated upon, one comes to the conclusion that

man has primarily been created from the womb of this earth and when he dies and is buried, his remains are not lost forever; they are returned to the womb from which he was once born. So when his initial creation was no matter of wonder, his re-creation should not cause incredulity considering the fact that the womb of the earth also has his seed in it.

Verses وَجَعَلْنَا فِيهَا رَوَاسِيَ شَاخِحَاتٍ وَأَسْقَيْنَاكُمْ مَاءً فُرَاتًا relate to the subject of providence raised earlier on in كِفَاتًا أَلَمْ نَجْعَلِ الْأَرْضَ كِفَاتًا. At many places in the Qur'ān, it has been alluded to that the mountains play a very important role in making the earth a cradle for the residence and up-bringing of man. This is evident from the above quoted verses of Sūrah Nabā' (78:6-7). Similarly, in Sūrah Luqmān, the words are: وَالْقَى فِي الْأَرْضِ رَوَاسِيَ أَنْ تَمِيدَ بِكُمْ (and set firm mountains on the earth lest it should lose its balance with you, (31:10)).

Another benefit of the mountains which occupies great importance with regard to providence is alluded to here: the height of these mountains is very effective in controlling the clouds and winds and in gathering natural water resources. Man is in need of sweet water and in order to provide him with this blessing the Almighty has created towering mountains. Only He could have made them; no one else has the power to do so.

In this manner, the discourse has gradually substantiated the Day of Judgement. No need remains to mention it in words. Consequently, its mention has been suppressed and the recurrent verse occurs here: وَيُلْهُمُ الْيَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ. The implication is that people who are fearless of the Day of Judgement in spite of witnessing God's providence and power and are adamant in denying shall be devastated on that day.

انْظِلُّوا إِلَى مَا كُنتُمْ بِهِ تُكَذِّبُونَ¹⁸

In the previous verse, the Day of Judgement was substantiated through the signs found in the world inside man and those found outside him. Now in these few verses, it is clearly depicted so that what at the moment eludes the eyes, is portrayed before these disbelievers. The style adopted is such that what is being mentioned is before them and they are being ordered that they should go towards what they have been denying till now and taste it.

انْظِلُّوا إِلَى ظِلٍّ ذِي ثَلَاثِ شُعَبٍ¹⁹

The horror hidden behind the words: "proceed now to that which you used to deny" is revealed in this verse. The word ظِلٌّ means "shadow";

18. Proceed now to that which you used to deny.

19. Proceed to the shadow which has three branches.

here obviously it does not refer to the conventional shadow but to the shadow cast by smoke. The words in Sūrah Wāqī‘ah are: (٤٤-٤٣:٥٦) وَلَا بَارِدٌ وَلَا كَرِيمٌ (the shade of pitch-black smoke, neither cool nor refreshing. (56:43-44)).

A characteristic of the shadow mentioned here is that it will have three branches. It is evident from this description that the shadow would spread in front of them in all directions. Only the direction from which these disbelievers will be pushed forward will be safe from its impact, as is evident from the word انْظِلُّوا (proceed). This implies that beyond this point smoke will engulf them.

While interpreting this verse, some people have raised the point that disbelief has three characteristics: 1) indifference to God, 2) indifference to God’s creation and 3) rejection of the Day of Judgement. It is as per these three characteristics that three branches of punishment will draw near the disbelievers and engulf them. This point sounds subtle; however, these three characteristics are inseparable and are also not common to the disbelievers. No evidence is found in the sources that disbelievers will be categorized on these bases. Hence, in my opinion, this interpretation seems far-fetched. A clearer interpretation is that directions are in fact four; so when they will be driven away from the direction which is secure from the punishment of the smoke, three directions remain, and all these will be embraced by smoke. It is as if, after being driven from this secure direction, they will be embraced with fire from all sides.

لَا ظَلِيلٌ وَلَا يُغْنِي مِنَ اللَّهَبِ (٣١)²⁰

Here, a misconception which may arise is clarified forthwith. The shadow will not protect them in any way. In the above quoted verses of Sūrah Wāqī‘ah, it has been similarly said that the shadow will be of pitch-black smoke which is neither cool nor refreshing. In other words, all harmful elements of smoke will be present and none of its useful elements which could have been expected to be present would be there.

إِنَّهَا تَرْمِي بِشَرَرٍ كَالْقَصْرِ (٣٢)²¹

The antecedent of the pronoun in إِنَّهَا is the fire, which is suppressed because of the mention of smoke – something which necessitates its presence. Some people have differed in the recital and interpretation of the word قَصْر. However, I have always preferred the *mutawātir* recital in this *tafsīr*, hence the word means “a castle” or “a dome”. It is a very

20. It does not provide shade or protection from the flames.

21. That fire, it will emit sparks like huge castles.

powerful comparison of the flames which arise from a large fire. This comparison depicts the expanse, height and colour of the flames. Castles generally are constructed on a high ground; they shine when viewed from a distance, and the colour of their tops is different from their bases.

كَأَنَّهُ جِمَالَةٌ صُفْرٌ (٣٣) وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ (٣٤)²²

The antecedent of the pronoun in the word كَأَنَّهُ is شَرَر (flames) mentioned in the previous verse and the words used are very apt. The word شَرَر is an adjective and can be used as singular or plural, masculine or feminine. Here it is in the plural and for this reason, it is compared to a plural entity جِمَالَةٌ صُفْرٌ (yellow camels). The word جِمَالَةٌ is used for a herd of camels. This comparison reflects both the colour and size of the flames. It is qualified by the word صُفْرٌ because in the wake of smoke, the colour of the flames is faded yellow.

This verse is followed by the recurrent verse. Its occasion is very evident: The day people will witness this horrific scene, on that day devastation shall be on these people who deny that day.

هَذَا يَوْمٌ لَا يَنْطِقُونَ (٣٥) وَلَا يُؤْذَنُ لَهُمْ فَيَعْتَذِرُونَ (٣٦) وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ (٣٧)²³

After a portrayal of the horror of the Day of Judgement, the helplessness of the criminals is depicted. Today, all these people are trying to be very eloquent and persuasive in their denial of the Day of Judgement; however, on that Day, they will not even be able to open their mouths; no one will be able to speak. In Sūrah Nabā', the counterpart of this sūrah, the words are: لَا يَمْلِكُونَ مِنْهُ خِطَابًا (٣٧:٧٨) (on Whose behalf there is no one who has the authority to speak, (78:37)).

It is specifically mentioned in the Qur'ān that on the Day of Judgement, the mouths of the criminals will be sealed and the Almighty will give power of speech to their limbs which will then bear witness to all their crimes. They will neither dare open their mouths nor will they be allowed to present any excuse.

The recurrent verse then follows and its placement and occasion are very obvious: when they will neither even be able to take the initiative in speaking nor will they be granted permission to present any excuse they may have, what is in store for them except death and devastation?

22. – As if they were like yellow camels – Demolition shall on that Day be upon those who deny.

23. That Day will be one in which none will speak and nor will they be allowed to offer excuses. Devastation shall on that Day be upon those who deny.

هَذَا يَوْمُ الْفَصْلِ جَمَعْنَاكُمْ وَالْأَوَّلِينَ (٣٨) فَإِنْ كَانَ لَكُمْ كَيْدٌ فَكِيدُونِ (٣٩) وَيَلْ يَوْمَئِذٍ
لِّلْمُكَذِّبِينَ (٤٠)²⁴

These verses directly address the disbelievers. It should be kept in mind that when they would make fun of the Day of Judgement, they would mockingly ask whether their ancestors too will be raised to life. By this sarcastic question, their intention was to prove that the Day of Judgement was the most impossible of events: how can it be imagined, they would scornfully reckon, that all their ancestors would be brought back to life. It is while keeping this question of theirs in consideration that the Qur'ān has emphasized its claim by saying: جَمَعْنَاكُمْ وَالْأَوَّلِينَ (We have gathered you and all those before you).

The implication of the verse فَإِنْ كَانَ لَكُمْ كَيْدٌ فَكِيدُونِ is that in the previous world these disbelievers contrived great plots to defeat the Messenger of God and if they now have any scheme left, they should test it too; they have with them all the people of their clan both those before them and those who came later, and if these people are in a position to help them, then they should seek their help too.

Here one needs to keep in mind the fact that all efforts undertaken by the disbelievers to deny their Messenger are called كَيْدٌ (plot) by the Qur'ān. The reason for using this word is that all these efforts on their part were merely aimed at saving their position of leadership, as has been explained at various places in this *tafsīr*; they were fully convinced of the veracity of the Prophet (sws); however, their egotism and self-centeredness did not let them acknowledge this fact; moreover, they went about inventing various objections and doubts in order to give the impression to the masses that whatever they were doing was based on reasoning and that they wanted to protect their ancestral religion through this. The truth of the matter, as unveiled by the Qur'ān in this verse, was that this was a plot and contrivance on their part.

This verse is followed by the recurrent verse; again its placement and occasion are very clear; their helplessness before the demand of God referred to earlier will become evident to them and they will face the devastation that will come to them as a result of this denial; it will totally rout them.

24. This is the Day of Judgement. We have gathered you and all those before you. Now if you have a scheme to plot against Me, then do so. Devastation shall on that Day be upon those who deny.

إِنَّ الْمُتَّقِينَ فِي ظِلَالٍ وَعُيُونٍ (٤١) وَقَوَاقِهِ مِمَّا يَشْتَهُونَ (٤٢)²⁵

The fate which the criminals will encounter on the Day of Judgement is mentioned in the preceding verses: they will be marshalled to a fire whose smoke will engulf them from all sides. Now in these verses, the fate of the righteous is being mentioned. When blessings are mentioned in the manner they are in this verse, the purpose is to bring to light the fact that these blessings will embrace them from all sides. This style can be observed at many places in the Qur'ān, and one can observe several examples of it in classical Arabic poetry.

كُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا هَنِيئًا بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ (٤٣)²⁶

This verse gives glad tidings to the righteous. Eating and drinking will be soothing to them and the food and drinks will be absolutely pure and unadulterated. They will be rewarded for their deeds. This is a reference to the fact that whatever the ingrates did in this world will be of no benefit to them in the Hereafter; in fact, it will become a source of their destruction because they did not fulfil the obligation which such favours as eating and drinking entail; on the contrary, what the righteous ate and drank in this world will be of benefit to them because they fulfilled all their obligations and duties.

The word هَنِيئًا means “to be beneficial and advantageous”. It is an accusative of state from the object evident from the previous verb. In Sūrah Nisā', the words are: فَكُلُوا هَنِيئًا مَرِيئًا (٤:٤) in which the *dhu al-hāl*²⁷ is evident; it is very common for an accusative of state to occur from a *dhu al-hāl*. For example, it is said of a traveller: راشدا مهديا.

إِنَّا كَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ (٤٤)²⁸

This verse points to verse eighteen above whose words are: كَذَلِكَ نَفْعَلُ بِالْمُجْرِمِينَ (Thus do We deal with criminals.) Here, in contrast, the dealing of God with the well-doers is referred to.

وَنِلْ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ (٤٥)²⁹

The placement and occasion of this recurrent verse are quite obvious:

25. Indeed, the God-fearing will be amid shades and springs and in the bliss of fruits they desire.

26. Eat and drink with relish as reward for your deeds.

27. This term refers to the noun which is described by the accusative of state.

28. Thus do We reward the well-doers.

29. Devastation shall be on that Day upon those who deny.

on the one hand, the righteous shall be in eternal bliss and, on the other, the disbelievers shall be subject to severe punishment, as is alluded to earlier. One should imagine the wide gulf between the two. When the two groups will witness one another's fates, at that time the people who were lured by the pleasures of this world and did not care for the Hereafter will realize their wretched fate.

كُلُوا وَتَمَتَّعُوا قَلِيلًا إِنَّكُمْ مُجْرِمُونَ (٤٦) وَيَلْ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ (٤٧)³⁰

Here at the end, the leaders of the Quraysh are addressed. What is said in the preceding verses was also addressed to them; however, that address was couched in the form of statements of principles. Here they are directly addressed and told that they should not be misled by the luxuries of life they possess in this world and construe that in the Hereafter too they will be blessed with them; on the contrary, these luxuries are transient. If they want to be their recipients in the Hereafter too, they should adopt righteousness; they are wrong-doers and they will get what has been detailed in the previous verses.

The placement and occasion of the recurrent verse are clear: such devastation as cannot be imagined in this world shall be upon the disbelievers on that day.

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ ارْكَعُوا لَا يَرْكَعُونَ (٤٨) وَيَلْ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ (٤٩)³¹

After the disbelievers are addressed in the previous verses, here, in this verse, the address has become indirect. They are reprimanded on their belief that they will be blessed with the luxuries and comforts in the Hereafter too since they have been blessed with them in this world: when they are told to kneel before the Almighty in order to express gratitude to His favours, they do not comply; on the contrary, they express arrogance. Kneeling down here actually refers to the prayer which is the greatest manifestation of showing gratitude to the Almighty and the greatest destroyer of arrogance and pride.

The placement and occasion of the recurrent verse are evident: the megalomaniacs and the haughty who are not ready to carry out their obligations and yet want their rights to be fulfilled should remember that their desires shall never be fulfilled; they will one day witness what is going to happen to them.

30. You may eat and enjoy also for a while; you are the wrongdoers. Devastation shall on that Day be upon those who deny.

31. And when they are asked to kneel before their Lord they do not do so. Devastation shall on that Day be upon those who deny.

Here, one should keep in mind what is said in Sūrah Qalam: when on the Day of Judgement these disbelievers will be called to prostrate before the Almighty, they will not be able to do so because they never prostrated before Him in this world. This will prove that they too are among the arrogant and for this reason they too will deserve the punishment which is specifically reserved for the arrogant.

فَبِأَيِّ حَدِيثٍ بَعْدَهُ يُؤْمِنُونَ (٥٠)³²

This verse reprimands the disbelievers on their stubbornness and expresses hopelessness about their embracing faith: when they do not profess faith in what the Qur'ān is warning them about, then what else will they profess faith in? In other words, nothing can be more persuasive, more eloquent and more potent than the Qur'ān. When it is not able to influence their hearts and minds, then what more can convince them? In other words, this verse actually assures the Prophet (sws) that the ailment of the disbelievers is incurable. They cannot be convinced through reason and argument; they will only believe when they see everything with their own eyes but at that time this belief will be of no use to them.

Some people have interpreted the word بَعْدَهُ to mean that after the advent of this day in which they will profess faith. To them, the verse means that if professing faith by paying heed to these warnings is beneficial, it is today; whether they profess faith or not when that day comes would become immaterial; on that day, everyone will profess faith but this will not be of benefit to anyone of them. Although this interpretation is possible, yet if the parallels of the Qur'ān are kept in consideration, the interpretation I have done seems more convincing. In Sūrah Jāthiyah the words are: (٦:٤٥) فَبِأَيِّ حَدِيثٍ بَعْدَ اللَّهِ وَآيَاتِهِ يُؤْمِنُونَ (and what can be greater than the revelations of God in which they will profess belief? (45:6)). Although both these interpretations are correct and the purport of the verses is not much different in either, however, my interpretation seems more comprehensive. God knows best and His knowledge is all-embracing and sound.

With the grace of God, I come to the end of the *tafsīr* of this *sūrah*.
فَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ أَوَّلًا وَآخِرًا (gratitude be to God from the beginning to the end)

Rahmānābad,

8th March, 1979 AD

8th Rabī' al-Thānī, 1399 AH

32. So what is it after this that they are going to believe?

Sūrah Nabā'

Central Theme and Relationship with the Previous Sūrah

This *sūrah* forms a pair with Sūrah Mursalāt, the previous *sūrah*. There is no basic difference between the central themes of the two. In the previous *sūrah*, it is substantiated from historical evidence and from evidence found in the world inside man and that outside him that an essential requirement of this world being created with a purpose is that it should end on a day of judgement; on this day, the righteous should be rewarded for their deeds and the wrong-doers punished for theirs. Similarly, in this *sūrah* also, the Day of Judgement is substantiated wherein those who rebelled against God would face punishment and those who feared Him would be rewarded for this attitude. The basis of arguments is divine providence evident in every single part of the heavens and the earth.

The tone of both *sūrahs* is the same. The discourse begins with questions which can only be answered in the affirmative. This style is specifically adopted for the disbelievers who were rejecting obvious realities. Together with the arguments offered, each verse is replete with reproach and rebuke. The glad tidings for the believers are also to be understood by them in comparison with the warning sounded to these disbelievers

Analysis of the Discourse

Verses (1-5): The disbelievers of the Day of Judgement are rebuked and admonished at the questions they foolishly pose at each other. They are informed that such is the profound nature of this news that if they even had the slightest bit of sense in them, instead of making fun of it, its fear should have given them sleepless nights.

Verses (6-17): A call to reflect on the signs of God's providence, mercy, wisdom and power which are found in every part of the earth and the heavens and what is in between them and which bear evidence that the Almighty has not created man in this world unaccountable and unchecked; there is a day which has been fixed for his accountability that is bound to come.

Verses (18-30): A portrayal of the horror of the Day of Judgement and the fate of the rebellious. Evident in this portrayal is the fact that nothing

of this world is eternal or beyond God's control; everything is subservient to Him; whenever He wants, He will have the trumpet blown in such a manner that people will rise from their graves and start to walk towards Him. The heavens, the earth, the seas and the mountains – all will be destroyed and dispersed. Hell will lie in ambush on that Day. It will become the abode of all the rebellious; all things which can cause pain to a person will be found in it and it will have nothing which will soothe or comfort a person. Each will face the deeds he had sent forward and each and every deed of his will be written in a register. He will be told that the fate he is destined to face is the natural outcome of his deeds; he will have to taste it.

Verses (31-36): A reference to the reward received by those who remained fearful of God: they will not be deprived of the reward of the minutest of their deeds; they will be rewarded for each and every virtue. They will be compensated for the harassment and hardships they faced from their opponents merely because they adhered to the truth and they will be blessed with a pure society which will not have the absurdities of the previous world.

Verses (37-40): A warning is sounded to people who are fearless of that Day because they believe in the baseless doctrine of intercession. They are told that that Day is bound to come and so he who wants to seek refuge with his Lord should adopt the path that leads to Him. In the presence of God, no one will be authorized to intercede for someone without His permission and after permission too whoever will open his mouth to speak, he will speak the truth and will dare not lie. On that Day, each person will face his deeds and the disbelievers will have to encounter anguish and yearnings.

Text and Translation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

عَمَّ يَتَسَاءَلُونَ (١) عَنِ النَّبَاِ الْعَظِيمِ (٢) الَّذِي هُمْ فِيهِ مُخْتَلِفُونَ (٣) كَلَّا سَيَعْلَمُونَ (٤) ثُمَّ كَلَّا سَيَعْلَمُونَ (٥) أَلَمْ نَجْعَلِ الْأَرْضَ مِهَادًا (٦) وَالْجِبَالَ أَوْتَادًا (٧) وَخَلَقْنَاكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا (٨) وَجَعَلْنَا نَوْمَكُمْ سُبَاتًا (٩) وَجَعَلْنَا اللَّيْلَ لِبَاسًا (١٠) وَجَعَلْنَا النَّهَارَ مَعَاشًا (١١) وَبَنَيْنَا فَوْقَكُمْ سَبْعًا شِدَادًا (١٢) وَجَعَلْنَا سِرَاجًا وَهَّاجًا (١٣) وَأَنْزَلْنَا مِنَ الْمُعْصِرَاتِ مَاءً ثَجَّاجًا (١٤) لِنُخْرِجَ بِهِ حَبًّا وَنَبَاتًا (١٥) وَجَنَّاتٍ أَلْفَافًا (١٦) إِنَّ يَوْمَ الْفُصْلِ كَانَ مِيقَاتًا (١٧) يَوْمَ يُنْفَخُ فِي الصُّورِ فَتَأْتُونَ أَفْوَاجًا (١٨) وَفُتِحَتِ السَّمَاءُ فَكَانَتْ أَبْوَابًا (١٩) وَسُيِّرَتِ الْجِبَالُ

فَكَانَتْ سَرَابًا (٢٠) إِنَّ جَهَنَّمَ كَانَتْ مِرْصَادًا (٢١) لِلظَّالِمِينَ مَأْبَا (٢٢) لَا يَثْبِتَنَ فِيهَا أَحْقَابًا (٢٣) لَا يَذُوقُونَ فِيهَا بَرْدًا وَلَا شَرَابًا (٢٤) إِلَّا حَمِيمًا وَغَسَّاقًا (٢٥) جَزَاءً وَفَاقًا (٢٦) إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا لَا يَرْجُونَ حِسَابًا (٢٧) وَكَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا كِذَابًا (٢٨) وَكُلَّ شَيْءٍ أَحْصَيْنَاهُ كِتَابًا (٢٩) فَذُوقُوا فَلَنْ نَزِيدَكُمْ إِلَّا عَذَابًا (٣٠) إِنَّ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ مَفَازًا (٣١) حَدَائِقَ وَأَعْنَابًا (٣٢) وَكَوَاعِبَ أَثْرَابًا (٣٣) وَكَأْسًا دِهَاقًا (٣٤) لَا يَسْمَعُونَ فِيهَا لَغْوًا وَلَا كِذَابًا (٣٥) جَزَاءً مِنْ رَبِّكَ عَطَاءً حِسَابًا (٣٦) رَبِّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا الرَّحْمَانِ لَا يَمْلِكُونَ مِنْهُ خِطَابًا (٣٧) يَوْمَ يَقُومُ الرُّوحُ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ صَفًّا لَا يَتَكَلَّمُونَ إِلَّا مَنْ أَذِنَ لَهُ الرَّحْمَانُ وَقَالَ صَوَابًا (٣٨) ذَلِكَ الْيَوْمُ الْحَقُّ فَمَنْ شَاءَ اتَّخَذْ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِ مَا بَا (٣٩) إِنَّا أَنْذَرْنَاكُمْ عَذَابًا قَرِيبًا يَوْمَ يَنْظُرُ الْمَرْءُ مَا قَدَّمَتْ يَدَاهُ وَيَقُولُ الْكَافِرُ يَا لَيْتَنِي كُنْتُ ثَرِيًّا (٤٠)

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Ever Merciful.

What is it that these people are inquiring about? Is it something concerning the Great News about which each person has a different view? Certainly not! They shall soon come to know. Again, Certainly not! They shall soon come to know. (1-5)

Have We not made the earth a cradle and made the mountains pegs? Not created you in pairs? Not made your sleep a means of comfort? Not made the night a covering and the day a time to earn livelihood? Not built above you seven sturdy skies and not placed in them a glowing lamp? And not sent down abundant water from dripping clouds so that We may bring forth grain and vegetation and gardens of luxurious growth? – Indeed, the Day of Judgement has an appointed time. (6-17)

The Day when the trumpet is sounded, all of you come forth in multitudes and the sky is flung open and therein appear gates all over and the mountains are set in motion so that they become a mirage. Indeed! Hell lurks in ambush; a place for the transgressors. They will abide therein for ages. Nothing cool will they taste therein nor will they have anything to drink except hot water and pus. A recompense according to their deeds. These people did not expect any accountability and had recklessly denied Our revelations and We have counted everything by writing it down. So taste it! We shall only increase torment for you. (18-30)

Indeed, for the God-fearing is success on that Day. Orchards and grapes; blooming maidens of equal ages and overflowing cups. They will not hear therein any nonsense or any false accusation. This will be the reward from your Lord, exactly according to their deeds. (31-36)

From the Lord of the heavens and the earth and all that lies between them; the most Gracious on Whose behalf they will have no authority to say anything. On the Day when Gabriel and the angels will stand arrayed. No one will speak unless the most Gracious allows and he shall speak the truth. This Day is certain to come; so whoever wishes can make his abode towards his Lord. We have forewarned you of an imminent doom on the Day when a man will see the earning he would have sent forward, and the disbeliever will cry: "O would that I were dust!" (37-40)

Explanation

عَمَّ يَتَسَاءَلُونَ¹

The word عَمَّ is actually عَمَّا; however, just as in general usage the sound of certain words is suppressed, in a similar manner the sound of *alif* has been suppressed and the word is always written thus.

The word تَسَاءَلُ means to mutually ask one another about something. An inquiry is at times meant to find out and research a matter and at times it is merely to make fun and indulge in vain talk. Here this inquiry is meant to make fun. It is mentioned in the Qur'ān at various places that when the Prophet (sws) recited out *sūrahs* to the Quraysh which warned them of the Hereafter, these *sūrahs* quickly spread and became often-discussed because of their intense tone, majestic and awe-inspiring style and incontestable arguments. In order to protect their masses from this penetrating influence, the Quraysh employed various foolish measures. Amongst these measures was one in which they would make fun of the Book of God so that they could give this impression to their people that it does not merit serious attention and is merely a baseless thing blown out of proportion and that there is no need to get influenced by it. Some of them would ask how people can be re-created when their bones decay. Some others would sarcastically inquire if their ancestors would be raised to life again when they have become part of the earth and not even a trace of their graves remains. Some would vehemently express the impossibility of such an event.

They would make fun of Hell and its fire by commenting on the kind of fire it would be as it would have water and trees in it; another person would respond by saying that all this is so foolish.

When the Qur'ān informed them that nineteen angels guard Hell, they again started mocking this information. One of them said that he alone would be enough to combat a certain number of these guards and another

1. What is it that these people are inquiring about?

boasted that he would take care of the rest and as such there was nothing to worry about.

In short, whatever information about the Day of Judgement they were given, instead of seeking a lesson from it, they would try to make fun of it so that their masses were not influenced by it. It is such comments and remarks expressed by them which are termed as نَسَاءُلُ by the Qur'ān. It has then angrily inquired: What is it that they are gossiping about?

The tone of the *sūrah* can be gauged from this question with which it begins. This style informs us that the disbelievers will be told that what they are making fun of is not something to mock and make fun of; if they only think, it is something which should worry them to death and lament what they have been doing.

عَنِ النَّبَاِ الْعَظِيْمِ (۲) الَّذِي هُمْ فِيْهِ مُخْتَلِفُوْنَ (۳)²

The word النَّبَاِ refers to some important incident or news. Although no word of interrogation is mentioned in words before this verse yet it is understood to be present before it. A very clear example of such an ellipsis can be seen in Sūrah Alam Nashrah where it is said: وَوَضَعْنَا عَنْكَ وِزْرَكَ أَلَمْ نَشْرَحْ لَكَ صَدْرَكَ (۹۴: ۲-۱) (have We not opened your heart, and relieved you of the burden which weighed down heavily on your back, (93:1-2). It is evident that no interrogative particle is mentioned in the second verse and the verse is in the form of a statement yet this interrogation is understood to be present. There are many examples of this style in the Qur'ān. In this *sūrah* also, succeeding verses depict this style. Most of our exegetes are unaware of this style and for this reason they translate such interrogative sentences as statements of fact. As a result, the real stress of the discourse is lost upon the readers because there is a great difference between a simple statement and an interrogative statement.

The meaning conveyed by the verse is: “Are these people daring to recklessly make fun of the great news which is being given to them about the arrival of the Day of Judgement in which reward and punishment is going to take place? Such is the gravity of this news that it should have made them lose their sleep and appetite; however, they are so unfortunate a people that instead of fearing such a day they are mocking it and making fun of it.

The word اِخْتِلَافٍ in فِيْهِ مُخْتَلِفُوْنَ simultaneously expresses two meanings: firstly, difference in opinion and secondly, contradiction in opinion and a little deliberation shows that both these meanings are

2. Is it something concerning the Great News about which each person has a different view?

inseparable. Difference in opinion springs from contradiction in opinion. I have tried to explain at a number of places in this *tafsīr* (see, for example my explanation of 27:66) that great contradiction was found in the views of the Idolaters of Arabia about the Day of Judgement: a group among them would blatantly deny it and another which, was in majority, instead of outright denial would raise objections about it; the people of this second group would express the opinion that in the first place it was highly improbable that the Day of Judgement would come and if ever it would there should be no cause of worry as they would be returning to their deities who would save them from God's grasp. They further contended that even if they would have to face God, it was incomprehensible how He would be able to take account of all the words and deeds of so many people. They also thought that since in this world they had been blessed with affluence which showed that the Almighty was pleased with them, there was no reason they would not be blessed by Him with such honour and success in the Hereafter as well.

Besides these erroneous beliefs, they also professed certain correct ones which would actually negate their erroneous beliefs but it was against their wishes to believe in the Hereafter and the reward and punishment of that Day. For this very reason, they were not ready to assess their contradictory beliefs and thoughts and remove these contradictions in spite of repeated reminders from the Qur'ān. In this regard, it is in fact an obvious requirement of sense and reason that if a person is intellectually disturbed in a matter which relates to eternal success or loss, he should carefully listen to those who are pointing out the contradiction in his views so that he may protect himself from destruction. Such an attitude is his own need and not of the people who are reminding him. The Qur'ān has actually called their attention to the fact that their contradictory views and mental confusions about the great incident it is informing them of does not augur well of their fate. This is a case of eternal loss or good fortune. It is a great favour of the Qur'ān that it has shown them the way out from their contradictions and differences of opinion. They should have valued and treasured this blessing; it is, however, their misfortune that they have made it a matter of entertaining themselves.

كَلَّا سَيَعْلَمُونَ (٤) ثُمَّ كَلَّا سَيَعْلَمُونَ (٥)³

This is a very powerful warning to them that the sweet dreams that they are seeing will never come true. The fate the Qur'ān is warning

3. Certainly not! They shall soon come to know. Again, Certainly not! They shall soon come to know.

them of will soon manifest itself. Here the sentence has not been repeated merely to emphasize the claim; this repetition actually is a statement of fact. As I have pointed out at various places in this *tafsīr*, the Messengers of God have simultaneously warned their people of two punishments: firstly of the punishment which as per the established practice of God has been faced by all those who have denied their respective Messenger and secondly of the punishment they will face in the Hereafter. This warning sentence has been repeated keeping in view both these punishments.

أَلَمْ نَجْعَلِ الْأَرْضَ مِهَادًا (٦) وَالْجِبَالَ أَوْتَادًا (٧) وَخَلَقْنَاكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا (٨) وَجَعَلْنَا
تَوَمَكُمْ سُبَاتًا (٩) وَجَعَلْنَا اللَّيْلَ لِبَاسًا (١٠) وَجَعَلْنَا النَّهَارَ مَعَاشًا (١١) وَبَنَيْنَا فَوْقَكُمْ
سَبْعًا شِدَادًا (١٢) وَجَعَلْنَا سِرَاجًا وَهَّاجًا (١٣) وَأَنْزَلْنَا مِنَ الْمُعْصِرَاتِ مَاءً ثَجَّاجًا (١٤)
لِنُخْرِجَ بِهِ حَبًّا وَنَبَاتًا (١٥) وَجَنَّاتٍ أَلْفَافًا (١٦) إِنَّ يَوْمَ الْفُصْلِ كَانَ مِيقَاتًا (١٧)⁴

In these verses, the Almighty has directed our attention to certain phenomena and signs found in this universe which overtly substantiate His power, providence, mercy, wisdom, *tawhīd* and the certainty of the Day of Judgement. So manifest and palpable are these signs that no upright person can deny them. At the end, it is surmised that whoever reflects on these signs will be forced to acknowledge that a Day of Judgement must come and its time of arrival is fixed in the eyes of the Creator.

First of all, attention is directed to the earth and the mountains set on it. If man denies reward and punishment in the Hereafter, then does he not reflect on the tremendous system of providence set up by the Almighty for man even though that it was not his right? As per this system, the Almighty has made this earth a place of comfort for him much like a cradle and has hammered into it these mountains as pegs so that the earth remains stable and is not shaken and rocked.

There are various aspects of wisdom behind setting mountains on the earth. The Qur'ān has alluded to them at various instances. In the previous *sūrah* also, a great benefit is referred to in this regard. In some verses, the wisdom behind this arrangement is unfolded by saying that mountains

4. Have We not made the earth a cradle and made the mountains pegs? Not created you in pairs? Not made your sleep a means of comfort? Not made the night a covering and the day a time to earn livelihood? Not built above you seven sturdy skies and not placed in them a glowing lamp? And not sent down abundant water from dripping clouds so that We may bring forth grain and vegetation and gardens of luxurious growth? – Indeed, the Day of Judgement has an appointed time.

maintain the balance of the earth and in their absence, it might reel away from its course taking man along with it: وَاللّٰحِى فِي الْاَرْضِ رَوَاسِيْ اَنْ تَمِيْدَ بِكُمْ: (He set firm mountains upon the earth lest it should roll away with you, (16:15)). The reference here too is the same. If man reflects on that around him, he will conclude that it is impossible that the Almighty who is nurturing and nourishing him in such an elaborate manner not bring a day in which He rewards the grateful and the obedient and punishes the ungrateful and the disobedient. Providence always entails accountability. If this does not happen then it would only mean that the grateful and the ungrateful are alike in the eyes of the Creator. This is such an unbecoming and unseemly conclusion that it cannot be attributed to the Almighty.

Although the discourse in اَزْوَاجًا وَاَخْلَقْنَاكُمْ (and created you in pairs) is a statement; however, in reality, since it occurs in conjunction with the interrogative sentence that precedes it, it also must be regarded to be interrogative in nature. I have already explained this earlier. Indicated in this verse is the greatest source of comfort which the Almighty has provided humankind in this world. Man was not created alone; he was provided with a mate for his comfort and mental peace. It should be kept in consideration that in this world the Almighty has created everything in pairs and each member of a pair complements the other and cannot achieve the purpose of its creation without the other. Each member of a pair may apparently seem the opposite to the other; however providence has placed such apparent and hidden needs in each that it is together with its counterpart that both members receive comfort and satisfaction and achieve a higher objective. Just as this feature is present in both the opposing members of a pair, it is also present between a husband and wife. The Qur'ān has alluded to this fact in Sūrah Rūm in the following manner: وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ اَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مِنْ اَنْفُسِكُمْ اَزْوَاجًا لَّتَسْكُنُوْا اِلَيْهَا وَجَعَلَ بَيْنَكُمْ مَوَدَّةً (among His signs is that He created for you spouses from your species so that you receive comfort from them, and He planted love and sympathy in your hearts, (30:21)). The Qur'ān has presented this harmony and accord between the opposite members of a pair as an argument for *tawhīd* and the Hereafter, and I have explained this at various places in this *tafsīr*.

Consider now the next verses: وَجَعَلْنَا نَوْمَكُمْ سُبَاتًا (and not made your sleep a means of comfort?). The real meaning of سُبَاتٌ and سُبَاتٌ is “to cut”; however, here it connotes both relief from hardship and comfort. Sleep is termed as سُبَاتٌ because it breaks the continuous process of movement and action and provides relief from hardship and also an opportunity to obtain peace and comfort so that the limbs get rejuvenated.

The verse وَجَعَلْنَا اللَّيْلَ لِبَاسًا refer to the fact that the night has been made

as apparel. This is because just as apparel hides a person and provides him with peace and comfort, similarly the sheet of the night also hides him to protect him from incursive elements and thereby provides peace to him and the strength to once again enter into the demanding realm of action.

The verse *وَجَعَلْنَا النَّهَارَ مَعَاشًا* refers to the fact that the daytime has been made a time for making efforts to earn a livelihood.

There obviously is a purpose in directing our attention to these signs: if a discerning person reflects on them, he will come to the conclusion that neither do the night and day follow one another of their own accord nor is this procession of theirs without a meaning or a purpose. It is an all-wise and all-powerful God Who has put them through this process to serve Him, which of course means that mankind is able to benefit from this service. Mankind, as a result, should remain grateful to the Almighty Who has made such elaborate arrangements for their livelihood and sustenance, comfort and luxury. They should also remember that all this arrangement of providence necessitates that a day come wherein it can be judged who remained conscious about good and evil and who remained indifferent to it and then each be dealt with accordingly.

After directing attention to the signs present in the earth, attention is directed in the verse *وَيَبْنِيَا فَوْقَكُمْ سَبْعًا شِدَادًا* to the signs present in the sky. Though the word “sky” is not mentioned in words, however the attributes mentioned clearly indicate that it is the sky which is implied. What is meant by *شِدَادًا* is the same as what is said in Sūrah Mulk in the following words:

الَّذِي خَلَقَ سَبْعَ سَمَاوَاتٍ طِبَاقًا مَّا تَرَى فِي خَلْقِ الرَّحْمَنِ مِنْ تَفَاقُوتٍ فَارْجِعِ الْبَصَرَ هَلْ تَرَى مِنْ فُطُورٍ ثُمَّ ارْجِعِ الْبَصَرَ كَرَّتَيْنِ يَنْقَلِبْ إِلَيْكَ الْبَصَرُ خَاسِئًا وَهُوَ حَسِيرٌ (٦٧: ٣-٤)

He Who created seven heavens one above the other. You will not find any fault with what has been created by the Most Gracious. Then look: can you see any flaw? Look again. Your look will come back to you worn out and overcome. (67: 3-4)

The implication is that wherever a person lifts his eyes to view this boundless roof, he will find it absolutely sound and flawless.

The reference to “the lamp” in *وَجَعَلْنَا سِرَاجًا وَهَّاجًا* (and not placed in them a glowing lamp?) is obviously to the sun. It is the sun which in this world is the source of light, heat and power. Were it not for the sun, the whole world would be plunged into darkness. It is evident from this that the sky and earth are not controlled by separate deities. Both are governed by the powerful and living God. Were it not so, how could there have been such

harmony between the sky and the earth? It is because of this harmony that the sun serves the needs of the inhabitants of the earth.

The word *الْمُعْصِرَاتِ* in *وَأَنْزَلْنَا مِنَ الْمُعْصِرَاتِ مَاءً ثَجَّاجًا* is conventionally used as an adjective for the clouds. This adjective denotes clouds replete with water and also for clouds which are in the process of producing rain. There is no essential difference in meaning in either case. The expression *مَاءً ثَجَّاجًا* refers to pounding, widespread and continuous rain.

The Qur'ān has substantiated all its basic claims through rain as has been discussed in various places in this *tafsīr*. Here the mention of rain points to the harmony between the sky and the earth thereby substantiating monotheism; however, the aspect of providence is manifestly present in this mention and providence itself is one of the important arguments that substantiates accountability and reward and punishment.

In the verses *وَجَنَّتِ أَلْفَاظًا لِيُخْرِجَ بِهِ حَبًّا وَنَبَاتًا* it is said that the purpose of this rain is to provide grain for man and grass and vegetation for his cattle. This rain also brings forth luxurious orchards.

The verse *إِنَّ يَوْمَ الْفُصْلِ كَانَ مِيقَاتًا* summarizes what is discussed thus far: all this elaborate arrangement of providence and the system of sustenance that extends from the sky to the earth shows that the Almighty Who has done all this will not leave man unaccountable; He has definitely fixed a Day of Judgement in which He will gather all the people and judge their fates. He will judge who among them recognized the obligation of all these favours of providence and who among them remained indifferent to it. He will then reward or punish them accordingly.

The way this verse is mentioned here shows that the system of this world from within clearly proclaims the advent of such a day. Unfortunate are the people who are not listening to it. The sun, the moon, the clouds and the winds and other phenomena are put in the service of man so that his needs are provided and he does not show indifference to these blessings.

يَوْمَ يُنْفَخُ فِي الصُّورِ فَتَأْتُونَ أَفْوَاجًا (١٨) وَفُتِحَتْ السَّمَاءُ فَكَانَتْ أَبْوَابًا (١٩) وَسُيِّرَتِ
الْجِبَالُ فَكَانَتْ سَرَابًا (٢٠) إِنَّ جَهَنَّمَ كَانَتْ مِرْصَادًا (٢١) لِلطَّاغِينَ مَابًا (٢٢) لَا يَبْقَى فِيهَا
أَحْقَابًا (٢٣) لَا يَذُوقُونَ فِيهَا بَرْدًا وَلَا شَرَابًا (٢٤) إِلَّا حَمِيمًا وَغَسَّاقًا (٢٥) جَزَاءً وَفَاقًا
(٢٦) إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا لَا يَرْجُونَ حِسَابًا (٢٧) وَكَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا كِذَابًا (٢٨) وَكُلُّ شَيْءٍ أَحْصَيْنَاهُ
كِتَابًا (٢٩) فَذُوقُوا فَلَنْ نَزِيدَكُمْ إِلَّا عَذَابًا (٣٠)⁵

5. The Day when the trumpet is sounded, all of you come forth in multitudes

After a portrayal of the arguments which substantiate a Day of Judgement in the previous verses, these verses portray the upheaval which will take place in the universe on that Day. Simultaneously, the fate encountered by the rebellious and the disobedient is depicted.

It is indicated in *يَوْمَ يُنْفَخُ فِي الصُّورِ فَتَأْتُونَ أَفْوَاجًا* that raising up mankind from its graves for the Day of Judgement will not be of the slightest of bother for the Almighty. At the sound of a trumpet, people will come out from their graves in multitudes and begin to tread towards the caller of God. At another place, it is said that people will emerge from their graves in the manner locusts emerge and will run straight towards the caller without any deviation.

The verse *وَفُتِحَتْ السَّمَاءُ فَكَانَتْ أَبْوَابًا* asserts that this sky which today seems to be so strong and robust and is in the form of a dome that does not have any fissures will be opened on that day in such a manner that there will appear doors all over it.

The verse *وَسُيِّرَتِ الْجِبَالُ فَكَانَتْ سَرَابًا* stresses that these mountains which are set firm on the earth will be uprooted and set in motion; today they are solid rock; however, on that day they will be fragile like dunes of sand.

The verse *إِنَّ جَهَنَّمَ كَانَتْ مِرْصَادًا* depicts that right after this upheaval, Hell will appear so suddenly as if it was lying in ambush behind the shield of this upheaval eager to become the abode of the rebellious; neither will any preparation be required for its appearance nor will it give any time to the rebellious to prepare themselves.

The word *أَحْقَابًا* in *لَا يَبْقَىٰ فِيهَا أَحْقَابًا* means “centuries”. At many places in the Qur’ān, it is explained as *خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا أَبَدًا* (they will remain in it forever). Some have interpreted this word as “a long period” signifying the fact that Hell will come to an end one day. This opinion is not correct. To understand a discourse, it is essential to interpret the concise in the light of the comprehensive and not vice versa. The words *خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا أَبَدًا* obviously are comprehensive and the word *أَحْقَابًا* is concise. Thus this concise must be understood in the light of the comprehensive and not the other way round. Moreover, this is a mention of the fate of the rebellious about whom the Qur’ān at other instances has specified that they will never be able to come out of Hell.

and the sky is flung open and therein appear gates all over and the mountains are set in motion so that they become a mirage. Indeed! Hell lurks in ambush; a place for the transgressors. They will abide therein for ages. Nothing cool will they taste therein nor will they have anything to drink except hot water and pus. A recompense according to their deeds. These people did not expect any accountability and had recklessly denied Our revelations and We have counted everything by writing it down. So taste it! We shall only increase torment for you.

In the verses *إِلَّا حَمِيمًا وَغَسَّاقًا لَا يَذُوقُونَ فِيهَا بَرْدًا وَلَا شَرَابًا* the word *غَسَّاقٌ* has been explained by lexicographers as blood and pus as well as boiling hot or dirty water. They will be denied anything cold there in totality. In Sūrah Mursalāt, even though the word *ظِلٌّ* (shade) occurs, it refers to the shade of smoke and it is further clarified about this shade that it will neither provide coolness to them nor will it save them from sparks of fire.

The verse *جَزَاءٌ وَفَاقًا* signifies that their punishment will be commensurate with their deeds. Whatever they earned in this world will be shown to them as an account. In the Hereafter, every good or evil deed will bear result as per its nature and it is this result which they will face.

The verses *وَكَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا كِذَابًا إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا لَا يَرْجُونَ حِسَابًا* imply that these people were never afraid of any accountability and remained indifferent to it and recklessly denied the verses of God which were recited out to them to inform them of it. The word *كِذَابًا* is a verbal noun and is meant to emphasize the verb *كَذَّبُوا*. Although its verb stem (*wazn*) is different, however it means “denial”. If this aspect of emphasis is kept in mind, then an accurate rendering of this verse would be: “they recklessly or blatantly denied”.

The verse *وَكُلُّ شَيْءٍ أَحْصَيْنَاهُ كِتَابًا* points to the fact that though these people thought that they neither would have to face any accountability nor any punishment, the Almighty had counted each and every deed of theirs by recording it in writing. This account shows the elaborate arrangement in the preservation of the record of deeds. The implication is that there is no possibility of any error or forgetfulness in it.

The verse *فَذُوقُوا فَلَنْ نَزِيدَكُمْ إِلَّا عَذَابًا* is in the present tense to make a future event more effective. They are told that although they remained indifferent to their fate, they will now have to taste the results of their deeds; simultaneously, to make them completely lose hope of any improvement in the future, they are informed that it is only torment and punishment which they will keep facing; they should not hope of being given any respite; the change that will come in their circumstances will only be a further increase in their torment.

إِنَّ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ مَفَازًا (٣١) حَدَائِقَ وَأَعْنَابًا (٣٢) وَكَوَاعِبَ أَتْرَابًا (٣٣) وَكَأْسًا دِهَاقًا (٣٤) لَا يَسْمَعُونَ فِيهَا لَغْوًا وَلَا كِذَابًا (٣٥) جَزَاءً مِنْ رَبِّكَ عَطَاءٌ حِسَابًا (٣٦)⁶

After a mention of the fate of the rebellious and the defiant, the fate of

6. Indeed, for the God-fearing is success on that Day. Orchards and grapes; blooming maidens of equal ages and overflowing cups. They will not hear therein any nonsense or any false accusation. This will be the reward from your Lord, exactly according to their deeds.

the righteous is mentioned so that the other side of the picture is also brought to light. There is great success for people who spent their lives fearing the Day of Judgement. It needs to be kept in consideration that the real thing which keeps a person on the right path is fear of the Hereafter. He who houses this fear in his heart is a righteous person and he who is devoid of it will soon be subdued by Satan and such a person then openly defies the Almighty.

The words حَدَائِقَ وَأَعْنَابًا (orchards and grapes) portray the success achieved by the righteous. Although the word حَدَائِقَ is commonly used for orchards of palm-trees; however, for such orchards too the height of delight was that the palm-trees be on the boundary while within it be grape vines and plantations of other fruits and vegetables. Here grapes are mentioned after orchards the way something specific is mentioned after the general.

The expression وَكَوَاعِبَ أَتْرَابًا mentions the *hurs* of Paradise. They are described as being in blooming youth and being of the same age. For mutual closeness, friendship and association, being of the same age is essential.

The expression وَكَأْسًا دِهَاقًا to the fact that they will be given brimming cups of pure wine. However, consumption of this wine will not intoxicate them so as to make them indulge in unseemly talk and perjuries – something which is an essential result of the wine drunk in this world. This wine will indeed take them to the height of delight and ecstasy but will not affect their senses. It will not inebriate them so as to make them indulge in indecent talk and in telling lies. It should be kept in mind that under the influence of liquor a person at times utters such nonsensical allegations that they become the basis of permanent enmity between families and tribes. Societies in which people become indifferent to honour and integrity ignore such customs; however, the Arabs were a very honourable people. If they would utter something even under the influence of liquor which would besmear the honour of someone, then this would have such far-reaching consequences that no amends could be made for it. The word كِدَابًا used by the Qur'ān refers to such conversation.

Earlier on, it is said of the disbelievers that they will be punished commensurate with their deeds. Here in the verse it is said that the believers will be rewarded commensurate with their deeds; the Almighty will not obliterate the slightest of their pious deeds; moreover, He has also promised them even more out of His grace.

رَبِّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا الرَّحْمَانِ لَا يَمْلِكُونَ مِنْهُ خِطَابًا (٣٧)⁷

The reward mentioned above is from the Lord of the heavens and earth and all that is between them and no one is His associate or partner nor can grant something to people on His behalf.

The words refer to the alleged deities of the disbelievers who think that they will be able to come in contact with these deities and that the latter will have the authority to ask God anything for these disbelievers and have it granted to them. The verse negates this false notion. No one will have even the authority to speak on His behalf; only those will speak in His presence who will be permitted to do so and they will only be able to speak the truth.

يَوْمَ يَقُومُ الرُّوحُ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ صَفًّا لَا يَتَكَلَّمُونَ إِلَّا مَنْ أَذِنَ لَهُ الرَّحْمَانُ وَقَالَ صَوَابًا (٣٨)⁸

The Idolaters trusted the intercession of the angels the most; they would worship them regarding them to be daughters of God. The verse says that Gabriel and other angels will stand before the Almighty the way servants stand before their master; none of them would be able to initiate a conversation; only they will dare open their mouths who are permitted by God and will only speak the truth. In other words, if the Idolaters wrongly believe that their deities will be able to cajole and convince the Almighty to grant them their wishes and will also be able to intercede for them in whatever manner they desire, this will never materialize.

The word *الرُّوحُ* refers to Gabriel. This word is used for him at many places in the Qur'ān. He is the archangel; he was mentioned the foremost so that it may become plain to the disbelievers that if he has no authority, the others have no standing whatsoever in this regard. Some have interpreted this word to mean the souls of people; however, there is no reason to accept this interpretation.

ذَٰلِكَ الْيَوْمُ الْحَقُّ فَمَنْ شَاءَ اتَّخَذْ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِ مَآبًا (٣٩)⁹

This is a declaration of fulfilment of a responsibility: it was essential to inform people of the arrival of that day and this has been done; it is now the responsibility of the people themselves; the day about which people

7. From the Lord of the heavens and the earth and all that lies between them; the most Gracious on Whose behalf they will have no authority to say anything.

8. On the Day when Gabriel and the angels will stand arrayed. No one will speak unless the most Gracious allows and he shall speak the truth.

9. This Day is certain to come; so whoever wishes can make his abode towards his Lord.

are being warned is certain to come; no one can defer it nor will anyone be of any benefit to others; so it is only in a person's own benefit to make his abode towards his Lord.

Three things are evident from *فَمَنْ شَاءَ اتَّخَذْ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِ مَا بَا*.

Firstly, the only responsibility of God and His Prophet (sws) is to inform people of the day and it is not their responsibility to force its fear to enter the hearts of people.

Secondly, on that day, it is only the Almighty with Whom refuge can be sought; no one will be able to seek refuge with anyone else.

Thirdly, the way in which refuge can be sought with God is that one should adopt His path in this world. He who does not adopt His path in this world will not be able to attain His refuge in the Hereafter.

إِنَّا أَنْذَرْنَاكُمْ عَذَابًا قَرِيبًا يَوْمَ يَنْظُرُ الْمَرْءُ مَا قَدَّمَتْ يَدَاهُ وَيَقُولُ الْكَافِرُ يَالَيْتَنِي كُنْتُ تُرَابًا (٤٠)¹⁰

This is the final warning; the imminent doom refers to the fact that after the advent of the Messenger of God among these people their fate is certain to be decided in this world, as per the established practice of the Almighty. This doom will be a prelude to the doom of the Hereafter. It is foolishness to regard the doom of the Hereafter to be far-off because this life has a short span and he who dies faces the Hereafter forthwith as is evidenced by the narrative *إذا مات أحدكم فقد قامت قيامته* (when anyone of you dies, his day of judgement is set up).¹¹

The implication of *وَيَقُولُ الْكَافِرُ يَالَيْتَنِي كُنْتُ تُرَابًا* is that on day the deeds of every person will be shown to him and those who have not prepared for this will cry out in anguish on their misfortune wishing that they had remained dust and that they never existed.

With the grace of God, I come to the end of this *sūrah's tafsīr*. *فَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ* (gratitude be to God from the beginning to the end).

Rahmānābād

4th April, 1979 AD

6th Jamādī al-Awwal, 1399 AH

10. We have forewarned you of an imminent doom on the Day when a man will see the earning he would have sent forward, and the disbeliever will cry: "O Would that I were dust!"

11. 'Alā al-Dīn 'Alī al-Muttaqī ibn Ḥusām al-Dīn al-Hindī, *Kanz al-'ummāl fī sunan al-aqwāl wa al-af'āl*, vol. 15 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1998), 289.

Sūrah Nāzi‘āt

Central Theme

In this *sūrah* also, a severe warning is sounded to the arrogant leaders of the Quraysh who reckoned punishment and the Day of Judgement to be improbable events. They regarded them to be mere threats and nothing to do with reality. The effects produced by winds and clouds are presented in this *sūrah* and the Quraysh are informed that they must not regard themselves to be beyond God’s grasp and should dare not deny the Prophet (sws). They are only secure as long as the Almighty has given them respite. As soon as this period ends, they will be seized by the Almighty without any difficulty. The winds and clouds which are present everywhere and are essential for their subsistence will become instruments of God’s wrath and will uproot and ravage them.

This *sūrah* resembles Sūrah Dhāriyāt and Sūrah Mursalāt as far as its preamble and meaning are concerned. The manifestations of accountability to God in this world and the majesties of His power and providence so evidently present around man bear witness that there will necessarily come a day on which the Almighty will punish the rebellious who disobeyed His directives and will bless with eternal reward the righteous who were fearful of Him and controlled their desires.

Analysis of the Discourse

Verses (1-5): Winds and clouds bear witness that the punishment of which the prophet of God is informing them is bound to come. The God in whose hands are the reins of the winds and clouds can make them into a source of blessing for those whom He desires and a source of suffering for whomsoever He desires. Nothing is beyond Him. The history of nations who have denied their respective messengers in this world bears witness that one day each and every person will be called to account before the Almighty.

Verses (6-14): A portrayal of the upheaval which will take place on the Day of Judgement as well as of what will befall its rejecters.

Verses (15-26): A reminder of the relevant parts of the tale of Moses (sws) and the Pharaoh for the admonition of the Quraysh. This mention is commensurate with the central theme of the *sūrah*. Moses (sws) very earnestly tried to bring the Pharaoh to the right path; however, he

resisted because of arrogance, as a result of which he was seized by the Almighty and this was not much of a bother for Him: a slight onslaught by the winds was enough to destroy them.

Verses (27-33): An argument is presented that re-creating man is not at all difficult for the Almighty: How can it be difficult for Him Who created the heavens and the earth, brought forth the night and day and arranged for the nourishment of people in such a thorough manner? His power bears witness that He can do so and His wisdom entails that He should do so.

Verses (34-41): A mention of the fate of the rebellious and the disobedient on the Day of Judgement. In contrast, glad tidings are given of the reward that those who remained fearful of the Almighty will receive on the day.

Verses (42-46): The Prophet (sws) is reassured not to be bothered by those who pester him regarding the time of arrival of the Day of Judgement and other details of this Day and who call for it in haste. The time of arrival of the Day of Judgement is something which only the Almighty knows; the Prophet (sws) should only consign this matter to Him; he has not been sent in this world to disclose its exact date of arrival; his responsibility is only to inform them about it. When people who regard it to be a far-fetched thing see it coming, they will feel that they remained in this world but for a short part of the day.

Text and Translation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَالنَّازِعَاتِ غَرْقًا (١) وَالنَّاشِطَاتِ نَشْطًا (٢) وَالسَّاجِدَاتِ سَبْحًا (٣) فَالسَّابِقَاتِ سَبْقًا (٤)
فَالْمُدَبِّرَاتِ أَمْرًا (٥) يَوْمَ تَرْجُفُ الرَّاجِفَةُ (٦) تَتْبَعُهَا الرَّادِفَةُ (٧) قُلُوبٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ وَاجِفَةٌ (٨)
أَبْصَارُهَا خَاشِعَةٌ (٩) يَقُولُونَ أَإِنَّا لَمَرْدُودُونَ فِي الْحَافِرَةِ (١٠) أَإِذَا كُنَّا عِظَامًا نَخِرَةً (١١) قَالُوا
تِلْكَ إِذَا كَرَّةٌ خَاسِرَةٌ (١٢) فَإِنَّمَا هِيَ زَجْرَةٌ وَاحِدَةٌ (١٣) فَإِذَا هُمْ بِالسَّاهِرَةِ (١٤) هَلْ أَتَاكَ
حَدِيثُ مُوسَى (١٥) إِذْ نَادَاهُ رَبُّهُ بِالْوَادِي الْمَقْدَسِ طُوى (١٦) أَذْهَبَ إِلَى فِرْعَوْنَ إِنَّهُ طَغَى
(١٧) فَقُلْ هَلْ لَكَ إِلَى أَنْ تَزَكَّى (١٨) وَأَهْدِيكَ إِلَى رَبِّكَ فَتَخْشَى (١٩) فَأَرَاهُ الْآيَةَ الْكُبْرَى
(٢٠) فَكَذَّبَ وَعَصَى (٢١) ثُمَّ أَذْبَرَ يَسْعَى (٢٢) فَحَشَرَ فَنَادَى (٢٣) فَقَالَ أَنَا رَبُّكُمُ الْأَعْلَى
(٢٤) فَأَخَذَهُ اللَّهُ نَكَالَ الْآخِرَةِ وَالْأُولَى (٢٥) إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَعِبْرَةً لِمَنْ يَخْشَى (٢٦) أَأَنْتُمْ أَشَدُّ
خُلُقًا أَمْ السَّمَاءُ بَنَاهَا (٢٧) رَفَعَ سَمَكَهَا فَسَوَّاهَا (٢٨) وَأَعْطَشَ لَيْلَهَا وَأَخْرَجَ ضُحَاهَا

(٢٩) وَالْأَرْضُ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ دَحَاهَا (٣٠) أَخْرَجَ مِنْهَا مَاءَهَا وَمَرْعَاهَا (٣١) وَالْجِبَالُ أَوَّسَاهَا (٣٢) مَتَاعًا لَكُمْ وَلِأَنْعَامِكُمْ (٣٣) فَإِذَا جَاءَتِ الطَّامَّةُ الْكُبْرَى (٣٤) يَوْمَ يَتَذَكَّرُ الْإِنْسَانُ مَا سَعَى (٣٥) وَبُرِّرَّتِ الْجُحِيمُ لِمَنِ يَرَى (٣٦) فَأَمَّا مَنْ طَغَى (٣٧) وَآثَرَ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا (٣٨) فَإِنَّ الْجَحِيمَ هِيَ الْمَأْوَى (٣٩) وَأَمَّا مَنْ خَافَ مَقَامَ رَبِّهِ وَنَهَى النَّفْسَ عَنِ الْهَوَى (٤٠) فَإِنَّ الْجَنَّةَ هِيَ الْمَأْوَى (٤١) يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ السَّاعَةِ أَيَّانَ مُرْسَاهَا (٤٢) فِيمَ أَنْتَ مِنْ ذِكْرَاهَا (٤٣) إِلَى رَبِّكَ مُنتَهَاهَا (٤٤) إِنَّمَا أَنْتَ مُنذِرُ مَنْ يَخْشَاهَا (٤٥) كَانَتْهُمْ يَوْمَ يُرَوَّنَهَا لَمْ يَلْبَثُوا إِلَّا عَشِيَّةً أَوْ ضُحَاهَا (٤٦)

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Ever Merciful.

Winds which tear out from the roots bear witness, and winds which blow gently bear witness, and clouds which drift in the air bear witness, then overtake each other, then reveal the command of God [that what you are being promised is certain to happen]. 1-5

Fear the day when a shudder will take place, followed by another quiver; many hearts will be trembling on that day, their eyes downcast. (6-9)

They ask: "Shall we be returned to our original state? What! when we become decayed out bones?" They say: "This return would be of great loss!" (10-12)

It will be just a single shout, then, all of a sudden, they will be standing in a ground. (13-14)

Has the story of Moses reached you? when his Lord called out to him in the sacred valley of Ṭuwā saying: "Go you to the Pharaoh; he has transgressed all bounds. Ask him: 'Do you desire to reform yourself? Shall I show you the way to your Lord that you may become fearful of Him?'" Then he showed him a great sign but he denied it and did not accept it. Then he turned back augmenting his efforts. Then he gathered and proclaimed: "It is me who is your supreme Lord." Then God seized him in the punishment of the Hereafter and of the Herein. Indeed, in this there is a great lesson for those who fear. (15-26)

Is it more difficult to create you or the sky? He made it and raised high its roof; then perfected it, covered its night and uncovered its day, and after that spread out the earth, and He brought forth from it, its water and its fodder, and set firm mountains over it as a means of benefit for you and your cattle. (27-33)

So when that great upheaval takes place [all of this will be destroyed]. On that Day, man will remember whatever he had done, and Hell will be unveiled for those who will have to encounter it. Then he who transgressed all bounds and preferred the life of this world to the

Hereafter, Hell shall be his abode, and he who feared the standing before his Lord and restrained his soul from lowly desires, then surely Paradise shall be his abode. (34-41)

They ask you about the Day of Judgement: "When will it come to port?" What have you to do with this? This matter rests with your Lord. You are but one who informs those people about it who fear it. The day when they will see it, it will be as if not more time has elapsed than one evening or one of its mornings. (42-46)

Explanation

وَالنَّازِعَاتِ غَرْقًا (١) وَالنَّاشِطَاتِ نَشْطًا (٢)¹

There are many opinions regarding the interpretation of النَّازِعَاتِ and النَّاشِطَاتِ. However, the dominant opinion is that they refer to angels who claim the souls of the disbelievers harshly and those of the believers gently. Although this opinion has become very famous yet it has no basis. Narratives which depict this opinion are found in *tafsīr* works and are not sound enough that an authentic opinion can be derived from them. There is nothing in the Qur'ān either that supports this opinion. Claiming the souls of the believers and the disbelievers is a matter which relates to the spiritual realm; it does not relate to the observable realm so that an opinion can be soundly corroborated on its basis. And the fact of the matter is that these oaths are sworn here to bear witness to a premise. Since our exegetes are of the opinion that an oath must be sworn by a sacred or blessed entity, they had to go to unnatural lengths to say that angels are implied by these words. I have indicated at various places of this *tafsīr* that generally the oaths that occur in the Qur'ān are meant to bear witness to a premise. The prominent element in them is to substantiate a claim regardless of whether the sworn entities are sacred or not.

In my opinion, النَّازِعَاتِ refers to forceful winds which uproot trees, houses and things firmly rooted in the earth. The adjectives of ذَارِيَاتِ and مُرْسَلَاتِ and عَاصِفَاتِ are also used for such winds in the Qur'ān and the words دُرُورًا, غُرْفًا, and عَصْفًا respectively are used with them for emphasis. Similarly, here the word نَزَاعَاتِ is used for strong winds which uproot trees and houses and the word غَرْقًا emphasizes their severity.

In Sūrah Qamar, the punishment of tempestuous winds which were sent to the people of 'Ād is depicted thus:

1. Winds which tear out from the roots bear witness, and winds which blow gently bear witness.

إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ رِيحًا صَرْصَرًا فِي يَوْمِ نَحْسٍ مُّسْتَمِرٍّ تَنْزِعُ النَّاسَ كَأَنَّهُمْ أَعْجَارُ نَحْلِ مُّنْفَعِرٍ (٥٤: ١٩-٢٠)

On a day of unrelenting woe, We had let loose on them a howling wind which plucked out the people as if they were uprooted trunks of palm-trees. (54:19-20)

The verb تَنْزِعُ is used in the above quoted verse. The word نَزَاعَات used in this *sūrah* is also made from this verb.

The word نَاشِطَات is from نَشِطُ which means to do something gently and also means to loosen the noose of an animal's string so that it can nibble and chew. Here, there is a strong indication that this word has been used to mean gentle and mild winds in much the same way the words فَالْجَارِيَّاتِ occur in Sūrah Dhāriyāt.

It should be kept in consideration that the apparent effects of strong and gentle winds are different; however, the grandeur and majesty of God is evident in both. Sūrah Dhāriyāt has a different context in which the gentleness of the wind is mentioned as a prelude to the mention of rain. Here the wind is mentioned independently because of which it can include both its good and bad effects. Its good effects are obvious because its blowing becomes a source of life, freshness and delight; however, both these type of effects are totally in the hands of the Almighty. If He wants, even gentle winds can become a source of destruction. Consequently, the account of Moses (sws) and the Pharaoh mentioned further ahead in the *sūrah* attests to this fact. The Almighty saved Moses (sws) and the Israelites through the impact of the strong easterly wind and it was the gentleness of this wind which destroyed the Pharaoh and his armies.

وَالسَّابِحَاتِ سَبْحًا (٣) فَالسَّابِقَاتِ سَبْقًا (٤) فَالْمُدَبِّرَاتِ أَمْرًا (٥)²

The word سَابِحَات is from سَبَحَ which also means “to float”. Contextual indications point to the fact that it is used as an attribute of the clouds. In the first place, the relationship between winds and clouds is inseparable; however, a very clear indication is that the two attributes mentioned subsequently begin with the particle ف which, on the basis of linguistic principles of Arabic, shows that these attributes are those of سَابِحَات and there is a sequence also between these attributes. I have already alluded to this principle in the previous *sūrahs*.

2. And clouds which drift in the air bear witness, then overtake each other, then reveal the command of God [that what you are being promised with is certain to happen].

A little deliberation shows that what is mentioned in the verses by the words *فَالسَّابِقَاتِ سَبَقًا* *فَالْمُدَبِّرَاتِ أَمْرًا* is very much the same as the one mentioned in Sūrah Dhāriyāt and Sūrah Mursalāt in the very similar verses: *فَالْفَارِقَاتِ فَرَقًا* *فَالْمُلْقِيَاتِ ذِكْرًا* and *فَالْجَارِيَاتِ يُسْرًا* *فَالْمُقْسِمَاتِ أَمْرًا* respectively. It has already been explained in these *sūrahs* that these attributes refer to cloud-laden winds which blow over areas they are divinely directed to and then they distribute the orders of the Almighty which means that they faithfully carry out these orders there: at some places, they send down rain as a blessing and at some other places, they cause disaster and destruction. At some places, they cause abundant rain and leave other places dry and thirsty. In other words, what is said in Sūrah Dhāriyāt by the words *فَالْمُقْسِمَاتِ أَمْرًا* is said here by the words: *فَالْمُدَبِّرَاتِ أَمْرًا*.

Prior to this, the words *فَالسَّابِقَاتِ سَبَقًا* portray the racing of clouds which becomes evident in the skies when various groups of clouds appear and try to outrun one another. It looks as if they are competing with each other at divine bidding and each one of them is desirous of fulfilling its duty first.

The complement of oath (*muqsam 'alayh*) of all these oaths is suppressed. Many examples of such suppression have occurred in preceding *sūrahs* like Sūrah Ṣu'ād, Sūrah Qāf and Sūrah Qiyāmah. When there is no need of mention, suppression is always more eloquent. Here since the cataclysm of the Day of Judgement is mentioned in detail in the succeeding *sūrah* which suffices to point to the complement of oath, no real need remains to mention it. If one wants to reveal it, one can do so in the light of Sūrah Mursalāt as (٧٧:٧) *إِنَّمَا تُوعَدُونَ لَوَاقِعٌ* (what you are being promised with is certain to come). In other words, by presenting the various effects of strong and gentle winds and clouds as evidence, the arrogant leaders of Quraysh are warned that the punishment they are being threatened with should not be regarded as impossible by them. Whenever the Almighty wants to bring it forth, He will not have to make elaborate arrangements for it; the history of the multifarious effects of the winds and clouds which exists and which has been recounted before them is enough for them to learn a lesson. Many nations much stronger than them which inhabited this earth were totally routed and decimated by the Almighty through the winds.

يَوْمَ تَرْجُفُ الرَّاجِفَةُ (٦) تَتْبُعُهَا الرَّادِفَةُ (٧)³

This is not the complement of oath as is the opinion of some; it is in fact a reminder of the day when they will face punishment they are being threatened with. The Messengers of God warn their people of two

3. Fear the day when a shudder will take place, followed by another quiver.

punishments: one which they will encounter on the Day of Judgement and the other they will face in this world if they reject their respective Messengers.

First, verses 6-14 depict the punishment of the Day of Judgement and then in the succeeding verses 16-17 historical evidence is cited which materializes in this world as a result of rejection of Messengers of God. The punishment of the Day of Judgement is mentioned first because it is this punishment which everyone should remain aware of. It is eternal and everlasting. In its presence, no one should feel secure even if no punishment in this world is to come. That the punishment of the Day of Judgement is supplemented by a worldly punishment because of denying the Messengers of God is merely a further arrangement made by the Almighty.

An ellipsis of a verb to the effect: “remember that day” has occurred before the word **يَوْمَ**.

The word **رَاجِفَةٌ** means a shudder and an earthquake and **رَادِفَةٌ** refers to the second jolt after the first. The upheaval that will take place on the Day of Judgement will stand complete through two trumpet sounds. Here the two effects of both these sounds are referred to. The objective is to make it clear to those who deny the Day of Judgement that they should not regard it to be an impossibility or a far-fetched probability. It will take just two jolts to wrap up this whole world.

فُلُوبٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ وَاجِفَةٌ (٨) أَبْصَارُهَا خَاشِعَةٌ (٩)⁴

In the previous verses, effects of the upheaval of the Day of Judgement which will appear in this universe are portrayed. In these verses, the effects of this upheaval on a man's heart and soul are portrayed. Many a heart on that day will be beating and the eyes will be downcast because of fear. This is the state of people who were fearless of this Day and when they were warned of it they would stubbornly make fun of it. On the other hand, the Qur'ān has clarified elsewhere that people who feared the punishment of that day without witnessing it will be safe and secure from the pangs of that day.

The antecedent of the pronoun in **فُلُوبٌ** is **أَبْصَارُهَا** (hearts). A person's heart is the real personality of a person and each and every part of the body actually reflects what goes on in the hearts. In particular, eyes reflect the most concealed thoughts of the heart. It is because of this relationship of the heart with the eyes that the latter are linked to the former in this expression.

4. Many hearts will be trembling on that day, their eyes downcast.

يَقُولُونَ أَإِنَّا لَمَرْدُودُونَ فِي الْحَافِرَةِ (١٠) أَإِذَا كُنَّا عِظَامًا نَخِرَةً (١١) قَالُوا تِلْكَ إِذَا كَرَّةٌ خَاسِرَةٌ (١٢)⁵

This is a depiction of the fun these people would make when they would hear about being recreated one day.

The original meaning of the word حَافِرَةٌ is “footstep”; however, when used idiomatically as in فَلَانٌ رَجَعَ عَلَى حَافِرِهِ أَوْ فِي حَافِرِهِ it means that such and such a person reverted to his original state. The implication is that when they are warned that they will be re-created after death so that they can be made accountable for their deeds, they would make fun of it and mockingly ask one another: “Hey! Will we be created again after we have become decayed bones?”

Here a repetition of an interrogative sentence is meant to express further amazement on their part: in the first place being re-created after death is strange and even stranger is the fact that this life will be given when the bones of the body have decomposed and become part of the earth. The implication is that no one can accept such a far-fetched and beyond-intellect thing.

The words قَالُوا تِلْكَ إِذَا كَرَّةٌ خَاسِرَةٌ express the fact that after making fun these people remark in a serious tone: “if what these religious clerics say comes true, then such a return would entail great loss and failure for us.”

Although they would utter these words in a serious mood also to make fun, these words reflect their inner-selves: Their hearts were not satisfied on denying the Day of Judgement. They thought that the arguments proffered in its substantiation carried weight and even feared the consequences of its denial but were not willing to give up the pleasures of life to accept this reality. For this reason, they would try to defer this threat by making fun of it and would reckon that if ever the Day of Judgement came, it would be of grave danger for them but they would tackle it when it would come; why should they make their life miserable now by worrying about it? It may be kept in consideration that this is the philosophy of all those who are careless in life whereas if the Hereafter is even given a slight thought, then it is but prudent to spend one's life in consideration of it.

فَإِنَّمَا هِيَ زَجْرَةٌ وَاحِدَةٌ (١٣) فَإِذَا هُمْ بِالسَّاهِرَةِ (١٤)⁶

The implication is that one should let them make whatever useless

5. They ask: “Shall we be returned to our original state? What! when we become decayed out bones?” They say: “This return would be of great loss!”

6. It will be just a single shout, then, all of a sudden, they will be standing in a ground.

comments they want to and let them express the impossibilities regarding the advent of this day to the extent they want to; but they should remember that when the Almighty wants to re-create them He will not need to make any elaborate effort for it nor will there be even a momentary delay in the process. Just a single shout would be enough to make them stand from their graves and gather in the presence of the Almighty.

The word سَاهِرَةٌ means “a level and wide expanse of ground”. Here it refers to the field of *hashr*. The single shout refers to the second sound of the trumpet. This has been explained in Sūrah Zumar in the following manner: (٦٨:٣٩) ثُمَّ نُفِخَ فِيهِ أُخْرَى فَإِذَا هُمْ قِيَامٌ يَنْظُرُونَ (then the trumpet will be blown again and they shall suddenly rise and gaze around them, (39:68)).

هَلْ أَتَاكَ حَدِيثُ مُوسَى (١٥) إِذْ نَادَاهُ رَبُّهُ بِالْوَادِي الْمُقَدَّسِ طُوًى (١٦)⁷

The previous paragraph portrays the punishment of the Day of Judgement. These verses depict historical evidence to substantiate it. As per this evidence, those who denied their respective messengers were punished in this very world. The account of the Prophet Moses (sws) is selected in this regard because it is the most famous evidence that can be presented.

The style هَلْ أَتَاكَ is meant to direct one's attention to the lessons that can be drawn from this account. It is not necessary that the singular pronoun present in these words address the Prophet (sws). I have indicated at various places in this *tafsīr* that this address can be general as well. Consequently, the words stated at the end of this account are إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَعِبْرَةً لِمَنْ يَخْشَى (٢٦:٧٩) (Indeed in this account there is a great lesson for those who fear the grasp of the Almighty, (79:26)).

This verse refers to that part of the account of Moses (sws) when he was returning from Midian and had reached the foot of mount *Tūr* and in order to fetch some fire after he had seen it glow from a distance or in order to find his way went to the valley of *Tuwā* in the dark of night; there he heard a voice saying: “Moses! I am your Lord. I have selected you for a great task: You will go to the Pharaoh as my Messenger and convey My message to him.”

This account is mentioned here in twelve small verses; however, it is the inimitable brevity of the Qur'ān that all phases from the calling of Moses (sws) to prophethood to the drowning of the Pharaoh – all are covered in such a manner that no aspect which is essential for seeking a lesson by the addressees is left out.

7. Has the story of Moses reached you? when his Lord called out to him in the sacred valley of *Tuwā*

اَذْهَبْ إِلَىٰ فِرْعَوْنَ إِنَّهُ طَغَىٰ (١٧) فَقُلْ هَلْ لَكَ إِلَىٰ أَنْ تَزَكَّىٰ (١٨) وَأَهْدِيكَ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ فَتَخْشَىٰ (١٩)⁸

This is the message with which the Almighty sent Moses (sws) to the Pharaoh. The word طَغَىٰ refers to the fact that Pharaoh claimed himself to be the great God and to the coercive attitude of the Israelites. The greatest rebellion in the kingdom of God is to claim being the God Almighty. In order to check his rebellion, the Almighty sent Moses (sws) with His special authority: he was to first gently ask him to mend his ways and if he accepted, then that was good; otherwise he should tell him what fate awaited him.

The words فَقُلْ هَلْ لَكَ إِلَىٰ أَنْ تَزَكَّىٰ imply that Moses (sws) was to ask Pharaoh whether he had an inclination to lead a pious life so that Moses (sws) might guide him to it. A little deliberation on this sentence will show that it simultaneously has great affection and also great majesty which should be the hallmark of an envoy of God. The implication is that till then his attitude showed that there was little hope of any good from him; however, the Almighty was very gracious; even then if the Pharaoh showed inclination to mend his ways, he would be guided to the right path.

The word تَزَكَّىٰ is used in its wider sense. It refers to a life which is without egotism, selfishness and oppression, a hallmark of people who are fearful of the Almighty.

It should be kept in consideration that the real objective of the prophets of God has always been to purify the inner-selves of people. They have achieved this objective through the Books of God. About the Prophet (sws), the Qur'ān says: هُوَ الَّذِي بَعَثَ فِي الْأُمِّيِّينَ رَسُولًا مِّنْهُمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ (It is He who has sent among the unlettered a Messenger from amongst themselves who recites out to them His verses and purifies them and [for this] he instructs them in *sharī'ah* and in *hikmah*, (62:2)). It was this very objective which Moses (sws) expressed before the Pharaoh: he told him that if he was willing to come out of his self-styled Godhead and was inclined to reform himself, then Moses (sws) would guide him towards God Almighty.

The words وَأَهْدِيكَ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ فَتَخْشَىٰ refer to the fact that though at that time, the Pharaoh was smitten and obsessed with the notion of being God as a result of which he had gone out of control; however, if he had the inclination to hear and understand the truth, Moses (sws) would tell him

8. "Go you to the Pharaoh; he has transgressed all bounds. Ask him: 'Do you desire to reform yourself? Shall I show you the way to your Lord that you may become fearful of Him?'"

who actually was Pharaoh's God and the God of the whole world, whom everyone should fear.

It should be kept in mind that a virtuous life emanates from the fear of God and this fear itself has its roots in the true comprehension of God. In these two sentences, Moses (sws) reminded the Pharaoh of this reality.

فَأَرَاهُ الْآيَةَ الْكُبْرَى (٢٠)⁹

Moses (sws) had spoken these words in the capacity of a Messenger of God and had also informed the Pharaoh that he had with him the proof of being a Messenger of God. The Pharaoh responded by expressing the fact that he did not know of any god except himself and that if Moses (sws) had any such proof he should bring it forth. At this, Moses (sws) showed him a great sign which of course was that of his staff turning into a snake. It has been called "a great sign" because except for the miracle of the white hand all other miracles were concealed in it and manifested themselves through it.

فَكَذَّبَ وَعَصَى (٢١)¹⁰

However, even after seeing this miracle, the Pharaoh did not accept Moses (sws) as a Messenger of God and dubbed him as a magician and a liar and denied him. The words وَعَصَى refer to the fact that the Pharaoh rejected his message which is referred to above in verses 11-12.

ثُمَّ أَدْبَرَ يَسْعَى (٢٢)¹¹

When the Pharaoh turned away after listening to the message of Moses (sws), he schemed to defeat him. At other places in the Qur'ān, one can find the details of this scheme. He called up his magicians in order to make them compete with Moses (sws) and Aaron (sws) and defeat them; when he consulted his court confidants, they opined that both Moses (sws) and Aaron (sws) were expert magicians and if ordinary magicians were made to contest with them, the chances of defeat and disgrace were quite high. They further opined that it would be better if expert magicians were called up from all parts of the empire and the contest should be held between the two in an open ground. The Pharaoh accepted this suggestion and a contest was held and the result was a humiliating defeat for him.

9. Then he showed him a great sign.

10. But he denied it and did not accept it.

11. Then he turned back augmenting his efforts.

فَحَشَرَ فَنَادَى (٢٣) فَقَالَ أَنَا رَبُّكُمُ الْأَعْلَى (٢٤)¹²

This is a reference to the final measure adopted by the Pharaoh when he saw the rising influence of Moses (sws). It is evident from Sūrah Zukhruf that whenever a natural calamity came upon Egypt, he would request Moses (sws) to pray to his Lord to protect them from it and that if as a result of his prayer the Lord in fact warded off this calamity, he would accept Moses' (sws) demand. However, when the calamity would be warded off, he would not fulfil his promise. His repeated breaches were instrumental in increasing the influence of Moses (sws) on the Copts. Overcome with worry, the Pharaoh gathered all the influential people of his nation and tried to revive his influence over them. The speech he delivered at this instance is briefly referred to here. Details are found in Sūrah Zukhruf thus:

وَنَادَىٰ فِرْعَوْنُ فِي قَوْمِهِ قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ أَلَيْسَ لِي مُلْكُ مِصْرَ وَهَذِهِ الْأَنْهَارُ تَجْرِي مِن تَحْتِي
أَفَلَا تُبْصِرُونَ أَمْ أَنَا خَيْرٌ مِّنْ هَٰذَا الَّذِي هُوَ مَهِينٌ وَلَا يَكَادُ يُبِينُ فَلَوْلَا أُلْقِيَ عَلَيْهِ
أَسُورَةٌ مِّنْ ذَهَبٍ أَوْ جَاءَ مَعَهُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ مُقْتَرِنِينَ فَاستَخَفَّ قَوْمَهُ فَطَاعُوهُ إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا
قَوْمًا فَاسِقِينَ فَلَمَّا آسَفُونَا انتَقَمْنَا مِنْهُمْ فَأَغْرَقْنَاهُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ (٤٣: ٥١-٥٥)

And the Pharaoh proclaimed among his people. "My people! do not the sovereignty of Egypt and these rivers which flow beneath my feet belong to me? Can you not see? So is this despicable wretch better or I; he can scarcely make his meaning plain? [If he is a Messenger of God] then why have not bracelets of gold been sent down to him or angels sent to accompany him?" He was able to befool his people through this speech and they were in fact a people disobedient. And when they angered Us, We took revenge from them and drowned them all. (43:51-55)

فَأَخَذَهُ اللَّهُ نَكَالَ الْآخِرَةِ وَالْأُولَى (٢٥)¹³

The word نَكَال means an exemplary punishment. When the Pharaoh insisted on his rebellious attitude in spite of witnessing and listening to everything, the Almighty seized him in the punishment of this world and that of the next. In this world, he was consigned to the waves of the sea and in the world to come he would be cast into the torment of Hell.

12. Then he gathered and proclaimed: "It is me who is your supreme Lord."

13. Then God seized him in the punishment of the Hereafter and of the Herein.

إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَعِبْرَةً لِمَنْ يَخْشَى (٢٦)¹⁴

Stated in this verse is the objective for which the tale of Moses (sws) was recounted. Although what is said is said in general terms, yet it is primarily addressed to the Quraysh. The implication is that if the Quraysh have some fear of God, they should learn a lesson from this tale. Wise are those who learn from the fate of others and not those who wait for a calamity to waylay them.

أَأَنْتُمْ أَشَدُّ خَلْقًا أَمْ السَّمَاءُ بَنَاهَا (٢٧)¹⁵

In the next seven verses, the Almighty has directed attention to His signs which reflect His power and providence. These signs are spread in every nook and corner of the heavens and the earth. They bear witness that the Creator of this world has such great power that accomplishing the mightiest of tasks is not at all difficult for Him. When He can create something as complex as the sky, how can it be difficult for Him to re-create mankind once it is totally obliterated? Similarly, the tremendous system of providence that pervades this world from the earth to the heavens bears witness that He will not leave people unaccountable; He will in fact necessarily gather them and see who fulfilled his obligations to the favours He blessed them with and who showed ingratitude in this regard; finally, He will reward or punish them according to their deeds. In other words, in this verse not only an answer has been given to the objection raised by the rejecters of the Day of Judgement as cited in verses 11-12, the need and wisdom behind the advent of such a Day has also been explained.

رَفَعَ سَمَكُمَا فَسَوَّاهَا (٢٨) وَأَغْطَشَ لَيْلَهَا وَأَخْرَجَ ضُحَاهَا (٢٩)¹⁶

Some great aspects of God's power and wisdom found in the sky are referred to here. The purpose is to induce people who think that re-creation is an impossibility to reflect how this can be so when they are witnessing the majesty and grandeur of His power around them.

The word سَمَكُ means "roof". After creating the sky and raising high its roof, the Almighty levelled it in such a perfect manner that no one can point out a single cleft in it at any nook or corner.

14. Indeed, in this there is a great lesson for those who fear.

15. Is it more difficult to create you or the heaven? He made it.

16. He raised high its roof; then perfected it, covered its night and uncovered its day.

The implication of the verse *وَأَغْطَشَ لَيْلَهَا وَأَخْرَجَ ضُحَاهَا* is that initially there was night all over within the sky. It was in the form of smoke as is alluded to in Sūrah Ḥamīm al-Sajdah. Then later the Almighty covered its night and unveiled the light of one part and made the night and the day subservient to a system. The implication of the verse is that can it be difficult to re-create mankind once it is no more for the God Who has the power to spread the blanket of night on this world. Was creating the first time more difficult for Him or the second time?

وَالْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ دَحَاهَا (٣٠) أَخْرَجَ مِنْهَا مَاءَهَا وَمَرْعَاهَا (٣١) وَالْجِبَالَ أَرْسَاهَا (٣٢)
مَتَاعًا لَكُمْ وَلِأَنْعَامِكُمْ¹⁷ (٣٣)

After the signs present in the sky, attention is directed to the signs found on the earth and the purpose here also, as I have pointed out above, is to indicate the power and providence of the Almighty: How can it be difficult to re-create mankind for the God Who spread out the earth and brought forth from it, its water and fodder, and set firm mountains over it to maintain its balance? When He accomplished all these tasks without any difficulty, how can it be difficult to re-create what He had created once?

The words *مَتَاعًا لَكُمْ وَلِأَنْعَامِكُمْ* point to the providence which is evident in every single part of this earth. The Almighty did not merely provide for the needs of man, He has also catered for the needs of the cattle which were created for his service. Man should now reflect on the purpose for which the Almighty has made such a tremendous system of nourishment and development for him. Has he been created merely so that he can eat and drink in this world for some period and then meet his end? Should God have no concern with how people led their lives; some of them were pious and other impious; some discharged their obligations towards His favours and others remained totally indifferent.

A little reflection will show that this supposition is absolutely baseless. If this is accepted, it would mean that this world is a place of merry-making. It would also entail that the creator of this world, God forbid, is not wise; he is a merry-maker who thinks that good and evil do not need to be distinguished. Can one even for a moment ascribe such falsities to the great creator of this universe?

A question arises from the words *وَالْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ دَحَاهَا* (and after that spread out the earth): Was the sky created after the earth? The reason for

17. And after that He spread out the earth, and He brought forth from it, its water and its fodder, and set firm mountains over it as a means of benefit for you and your cattle.

this is that in Sūrah Ḥamīm al-Sajdah after the creation of the earth and of certain signs that belong to it are mentioned, it is said: ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ إِلَى السَّمَاءِ وَهِيَ دُخَانٌ (then, turning to the sky, which was but a cloud of vapour, (41:11)). This evidently means that the sky was created after the earth. I have already answered this question in the *tafsīr* of the afore-mentioned *sūrah*. Readers are advised to look it up. Here, it would suffice to keep in mind the fact that the picture portrayed by the Qur'ān about the creation of the sky and the earth is like that of a building. The sky is the roof of this building and the earth is its floor. When the map of a building is drawn both the floor and the roof are considered simultaneously and the structural plan of both is prepared at the same time. However, during the various phases of construction, at times work is done on the floor and its related structures and at times work is done on the roof and its related structures. From the verses of Sūrah Ḥamīm al-Sajdah at first one gathers that the earth was created first; however, at the same time it is stated that when the Almighty wanted to create the sky it was in the form of vapour in technical parlance “a nebula”. Similarly, here in the verse under discussion although at first it seems that the sky was created first, it can be assumed that this refers to a particular phase of creation after which the creation of the earth was given final touches in the final phase of its creation. Our limited intellect cannot grasp the matter of creation of this unfathomable universe. Only the Almighty has complete knowledge of all its phases of its creation.

¹⁸ فَإِذَا جَاءَتْ الظَّامَّةُ الْكُبْرَى (٣٤)

The expression *الظَّامَّةُ الْكُبْرَى* means “a great upheaval and an extreme disorder”, and of course refers to the Day of Judgement. The answer to this conditional sentence is suppressed as it is understood. Many examples of such suppressions can be seen in the previous *sūrahs* and I have pointed out the eloquence in them. The implication is that when that great upheaval will take place the earth and sky and what is between them will be destroyed.

¹⁹ يَوْمَ يَتَذَكَّرُ الْإِنْسَانُ مَا سَعَى (٣٥)

The word *يَوْمَ* is the adverb of place (*ẓarf*) of the suppressed answer-sentence referred to in the previous verse. In verse 6, this same word is the adverb of place of the suppressed complement of oath (*muqsam*

18. So when that great upheaval takes place [all of this will be destroyed].

19. On that Day, man will remember whatever he had done.

'alayh). I have translated this verse accordingly.

The implication is that today man inebriated in indifference is unaware of what he is doing; when he is warned of that day, he makes fun of it; however, when that day arrives, he will come to his senses and see what he has earned in the Hereafter.

وُبُرْزَتِ الْجَحِيمُ لِمَنْ يَرَى (٣٦)²⁰

Today man regards the Day of Judgement and Hell to be far-fetched; however, on that day Hell will be unveiled to people who will be cast into it. The implication is that Hell will be absolutely ready for them; only the veil will need to be lifted. As soon as this happens, it will be before the very eyes of all those people who were not willing to believe in it unless they saw it.

The words لِمَنْ يَرَى refer to people for whom facing Hell has been ordained because of their deeds. As for the servants of God who feared Hell without seeing it, they will be kept away from it by God and they will not even hear its sound.

فَأَمَّا مَنْ طَغَى (٣٧) وَآثَرَ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا (٣٨) فَإِنَّ الْجَحِيمَ هِيَ الْمَأْوَى (٣٩)²¹

Hell shall be the permanent abode of such criminals. In verse seventeen earlier, the rebelliousness of the Pharaoh has already been mentioned. Here it is stated that only those people become rebellious who ignore the Hereafter and become slaves of this world; they are not willing to think and accept anything else.

The words هِيَ الْمَأْوَى (this Hell shall be his abode) emphasize the fact that they will abide in Hell forever; they will have no other place to go.

وَأَمَّا مَنْ خَافَ مَقَامَ رَبِّهِ وَنَهَى النَّفْسَ عَنِ الْهَوَى (٤٠) فَإِنَّ الْجَنَّةَ هِيَ الْمَأْوَى (٤١)²²

On the other hand, those who feared facing the Almighty and instead of running after this world curbed their tendencies to succumb to base desires, Paradise shall be their resting place and they shall never be taken out from it.

The expression مَنْ خَافَ مَقَامَ رَبِّهِ means to fear standing before the Lord.

20. And Hell will be unveiled for those who will have to encounter it.

21. Then he who transgressed all bounds and preferred the life of this world to the Hereafter, Hell shall be his abode.

22. And he who feared the standing before his Lord and restrained his soul from lowly desires, then surely Paradise shall be his abode.

In Sūrah Muṭaffifīn, this has been explained thus:

أَلَا يَظُنُّ أُولَئِكَ أَنَّهُمْ مَبْعُوثُونَ لِيَوْمٍ عَظِيمٍ يَوْمَ يَقُومُ النَّاسُ لِرَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ (٨٣: ٤-٦)

Do these people not think that they will be raised up one day? For presence on a great day. The day when men will rise to stand up before the Lord of the worlds. (83:3-4)

It is the fear of this encounter with the Almighty which stops a person from following his base desires. In the absence of such a fear, nothing can stop a person from running after his desires.

يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ السَّاعَةِ أَيَّانَ مُرْسَاهَا (٤٢: ٢٣)

It is in this verse and in the concluding verses of the *sūrah* that the Prophet (sws) has been sounded assurance. He has been told not to bother about such people who, in order to tease and ridicule him, ask him about the time of the Day of Judgement: the only responsibility of the Prophet (sws) was to inform people that such a day will come so that those who wanted to be on guard were afforded an opportunity; as for people who wanted to believe in it only after witnessing it and wished to find out its time of arrival, the Prophet (sws) was not responsible for satisfying their demands; those people asked such a question merely to invent an excuse to deny it.

The expression أَيَّانَ مُرْسَاهَا refers to the fact that they ask about its arrival. The particle أَيَّانَ is meant to inquire about some future event; hence it would be erroneous to translate it as “where”; its correct translation is “when”.

The word مُرْسَى means to come to port and set anchor. Concealed in this word is a kind of sarcasm: these disbelievers ask: “for long have we been hearing news that the Day of Judgement is about to come; it has neither come as yet nor will it ever come; when will this ship set anchor on our shores; while waiting for it our eyes have tired out.”

فِيمَ أَنتَ مِنْ ذِكْرَاهَا (٤٣) إِلَى رَبِّكَ مُنتَهَاهَا (٤٤: ٢٤)

The Prophet (sws) is assured that he has not been sent to inform them of its time of arrival; no one except the Almighty has knowledge of this; so they should not concern themselves with a question which in the very first place does not relate to them; why should they interrogate the Prophet

23. They ask you about the Day of Judgement: “When will it come to port?”

24. What have you to do with this? This matter rests with your Lord.

(sws) in this regard? they should consign this matter to the Almighty only Who knows its time of arrival.

إِنَّمَا أَنْتَ مُنْذِرُ مَنِ يَخْشَاهَا (٤٥)²⁵

The Prophet (sws) is further assured that he is not responsible for people who want to believe in the Day of Judgement only after seeing it; he should leave them to themselves; his warnings will only affect those who believe in and fear this Day in the light of arguments even though they have not seen it.

كَأَنَّهُمْ يَوْمَ يَرَوْنَهَا لَمْ يَلْبَثُوا إِلَّا عَشِيَّةً أَوْ ضُحَاهَا (٤٦)²⁶

The implication of this verse is that these people should not be deluded by the fact that if the Day of Judgement is not being shown to them today or a time is not fixed, they need not worry about its advent since it is far-off. When they see it, they will realize that they did not remain in this world for more than the first or last part of a day.

With the grace of God, I come to the end of the *tafsīr* of this *sūrah*. وَلِلَّهِ الْحَمْدُ أَوَّلًا وَآخِرًا (gratitude be to God only from the beginning to the end)

Lahore,

27th April, 1979 AD

29th Jumadī al-Awwal, 1399 AH

25. You are but one who informs those people about it who fear it.

26. The day when they will see it, it will be as if not more time has elapsed than one evening or one of its mornings.

Sūrah ‘Abas

Central Theme and Relationship with the Preceding Sūrah

This *sūrah* forms a pair with Sūrah Nāzi‘āt, the previous *sūrah*. There is no basic difference between the central theme of both *sūrahs*. Both the style of the discourse and the manner of reasoning have very obvious similarity. The sequence of the topics covered in both is, however, different. It is this change that endows this *sūrah* with a new majesty and is the only thing which distinguishes it from the previous *sūrah*. By going through both these *sūrahs*, one can determine their similarities and dissimilarities.

At the end of the previous *sūrah*, the Prophet (sws) was assured by the words: (إِنَّمَا أَنْتَ مُنذِرٌ مَّنْ يَخْشَاهَا (٧٩:٤٥) (you are but a warner for people who fear it, (79:45)). This *sūrah* begins with this very subject: The Prophet (sws) is rebuked for wasting time on the arrogant leaders of the Quraysh who would find new excuses each day to not profess faith. They were the ones who out of arrogance would demand from the Prophet (sws) to turn out his poor companions from his presence if he wanted these leaders to sit with him. In the whole of this *sūrah*, these arrogant and haughty leaders are scolded severely. Although the Prophet (sws) is addressed, yet the direction of this stern address is towards these supercilious people.

Analysis of the Discourse

Verses (1-10): The Prophet (sws) is rebuked with reference to an incident: the haughty and conceited who are showing indifference to the message and reminders sounded by the Prophet (sws) and who are desirous that he should turn out his poor companions from his gatherings if he wants them to come to him should not be tolerated by the Prophet (sws). Their responsibility does not rest on him and therefore he by pampering them must not end up disregarding his obligation towards his companions who are ready to give up their lives for him. His real responsibility is to educate and instruct only those who come to him enthusiastically. He is not accountable for those who do not come to him and are desirous of being pampered. So he must not go after them at the cost of his own companions.

Verses (11-16): A mention of the grandeur and majesty of the Qur’ān: it

is a reminder revealed by God; so whoever wants, he should benefit from it. Those who do not value it will themselves face its consequences. It is an authoritative word of God which commands obedience; it is not the request of a supplicant. Therefore the Prophet (sws) should present it before people in a befitting manner. Those whom the Almighty has entrusted it with are noble and highly honoured people and the Prophet (sws) too is among them. He should not pamper these arrogant and haughty people to an extent which is against his status and as well as the honour of the message he is presenting.

Verses (17-23): An expression of sorrow at the state of the arrogant who are adamant on denying the Day of judgement. They are reminded of the various phases of their life: It is very sad and unfortunate if the human being who is created from the drop of a fluid and after passing through different phases reaches his grave regards re-creation to be an impossibility. Those who are not willing to profess belief after such manifest arguments will not be convinced by any other argument.

Verses (24-32): After focusing our attention to the phases of man's creation, a reference is made to the tremendous system of providence which the Almighty has set up for human beings as well as for animals. This shows that the Being who has made such an elaborate arrangement to nourish and nurture man will never leave people unaccountable for the blessings He has bestowed on them; one day, He will definitely call them to account. Only those people will succeed on that day who fulfilled their obligation towards these favours; those who were not able to do so will end up doomed and humiliated.

Verses (33-42): A portrayal of the Day of Judgement: people on that day will be so engrossed in their own affairs that they will become unconcerned with their near ones. A depiction of the joy of those who led their lives while being fearful of this day and of the misfortune and gloom of those who remained indifferent to this day and died in this state.

Text and Translation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

عَبَسَ وَتَوَلَّى (۱) أَنْ جَاءَهُ الْأَعْمَى (۲) وَمَا يُدْرِيكَ لَعَلَّهٗ يَزْكَى (۳) أَوْ يَذَّكَّرُ فَتَنْفَعَهُ
الذِّكْرَى (۴) أَمَّا مَنْ اسْتَعْجَلَ (۵) فَأَنْتَ لَهُ تَصَدَّى (۶) وَمَا عَلَيْكَ أَلَّا يَزْكَى (۷) وَأَمَّا مَنْ
جَاءَكَ يَسْعَى (۸) وَهُوَ يَخْشَى (۹) فَأَنْتَ عَنْهُ تَلَهَّى (۱۰) كَلَّا إِنَّهَا تَذْكِرَةٌ (۱۱) فَمِنْ شَاءَ
ذَكَرَهُ (۱۲) فِي صُحُفٍ مُّكَرَّمَةٍ (۱۳) مَرْفُوعَةٍ مُّطَهَّرَةٍ (۱۴) بِأَيْدِي سَفَرَةٍ (۱۵) كِرَامٍ بَرَرَةٍ

(١٦) قُتِلَ الْإِنْسَانُ مَا أَكْفَرَهُ (١٧) مِنْ أَيِّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقَهُ (١٨) مِنْ نُطْقَةٍ خَلَقَهُ فَقَدَرَهُ (١٩)
 ثُمَّ السَّبِيلَ يَسَّرَهُ (٢٠) ثُمَّ أَمَاتَهُ فَأَقْبَرَهُ (٢١) ثُمَّ إِذَا شَاءَ أَنْشَرَهُ (٢٢) كَلَّا لَمَّا يَقْضِ مَا أَمَرَهُ
 (٢٣) فَلْيَنْظُرِ الْإِنْسَانُ إِلَى طَعَامِهِ (٢٤) أَنَّا صَبَبْنَا الْمَاءَ صَبًّا (٢٥) ثُمَّ شَقَقْنَا الْأَرْضَ شَقًّا
 (٢٦) فَأَنْبَتْنَا فِيهَا حَبًّا (٢٧) وَعَيْنًا وَقَضْبًا (٢٨) وَزَيْتُونًا وَنَخْلًا (٢٩) وَحَدَائِقَ غُلْبًا (٣٠)
 وَفَاكِهَةً وَأَبًّا (٣١) مَتَاعًا لَكُمْ وَلِأَنْعَامِكُمْ (٣٢) فَإِذَا جَاءَتِ الصَّاعَةُ (٣٣) يَوْمَ يَفِرُّ
 الْمَرْءُ مِنْ أَخِيهِ (٣٤) وَأُمِّهِ وَأَبِيهِ (٣٥) وَصَاحِبَتِهِ وَبَنِيهِ (٣٦) لِكُلِّ امْرِئٍ مِنْهُمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ
 شَأْنٌ يُغْنِيهِ (٣٧) وَجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ مُسْفِرَةٌ (٣٨) ضَاحِكَةٌ مُسْتَبْشِرَةٌ (٣٩) وَجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ
 عَلَيْهَا غَبَرَةٌ (٤٠) تَرْهَقُهَا قَتَرَةٌ (٤١) أُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْكَافِرَةُ الْفَجَرَةُ (٤٢)

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Ever Merciful.

He frowned and turned away because there came to him a blind man. And what do you know that he might have sought to reform himself or might have heard the counsel and this counsel might have benefited him. (1-4)

He who shows indifference, you go after him even though you are not responsible if he does not reform himself; and he who comes to you with zeal and also fears God, you show indifference to him. (5-10)

Certainly not! This is but a reminder; so whoever wishes, can be reminded through it; in esteemed pages, exalted and untouched, in the custody of scribes, honourable and faithful. (11-16)

Woe to man! How ungrateful he is! From what was he created? From a drop of fluid. He created him and then measured out for him. Then eased out the path for him. He then gave him death; then He had him put in a grave. Then whenever He intends, He will raise him to life. (17-22)

Certainly not! He has still not complied with what his Lord had asked him. Thus man should reflect on his food that We poured forth water in abundance then cleaved the earth asunder, then produced in it grain, grapes, vegetables, olives, dates, dense orchards, fruits and herbage as means of sustenance for you and your cattle. (23-32)

So when the deafening blast comes! [Then that certain thing will manifest itself]. On that Day, man will flee from his brother, mother, father, his wife and his sons. Every one, on that Day, will be concerned with his own self. Many a face on that day will be bright, smiling and rejoicing, and many a face on that day will be gloomy and dark. These very disbelievers, these insolent. (33-42)

Explanation

عَبَسَ وَتَوَلَّى (١) أَنْ جَاءَهُ الْأَعْمَى (٢)¹

The subject of the verb عَبَسَ is not mentioned here; however, it becomes evident from the succeeding verses that the Prophet (sws) is its subject. All exegetes are unanimous that the verse refers to 'Abdullāh ibn Umm Maktūm (rta). He was a poor and blind Companion. It is mentioned in some narratives that one day the Prophet (sws) was talking to one of the leaders of the Quraysh or to a group of them; he was presenting the message of Islam before them and they must have been presenting their objections and doubts regarding Islam. During this conversation, 'Abdullāh ibn Umm Maktūm (rta) came over and without realizing the delicate nature of the meeting entered upon them. The Prophet (sws) did not approve of his untimely entry. This dislike on the part of the Prophet (sws) of course could not have been because he was poor or blind. Who could have cared more for the poor and the blind than the Prophet (sws) himself. The Prophet (sws) must have thought that because of 'Abdullāh's ill-timed arrival, he might lose an opportunity to tame these savage leaders; they would shy away and say that if such poor paupers are going to gather round the Prophet (sws), why should they sit with him and undermine their honour and status.

It should remain in consideration that one of the prominent objections of the leaders of the Quraysh on the Prophet (sws) was that his companions were the poverty-stricken and the destitute. They regarded this to be an argument against his prophethood. Moreover, another thing which could have been a cause of apprehension for the Prophet (sws) was that he feared that these leaders being inebriated with their superiority might show disrespect and disregard to a very dear companion of his which of course would cause even more distaste.

This incident which took place quite accidentally was used by the Almighty for the instruction and education of the Prophet (sws): He was told to make his companions who zealously wanted to reform themselves the real focus of attention; they were the ones who would enthusiastically come to his presence; he should not go after those who were indifferent to him and wanted the Prophet (sws) to pamper them.

It has been explained at a number of places in the previous *sūrahs* that in the initial stages the Prophet (sws) would diligently call the leadership of the Quraysh to the message of Islam. The reason for this was that he had been initially directed to address only them as is evident from the following verse: (٢٦:٢١٤) وَأَنْذِرْ عَشِيرَتَكَ الْأَقْرَبِينَ (and warn your near

1. He frowned and turned away because there came to him a blind man.

family, (26:214)). Secondly, it was the Quraysh who were the leaders of all Arabia. It was hoped that if they embraced Islam, this would pave the way of its acceptance in all of Arabia. Consequently, for some time, the Prophet (sws) directed all his preaching efforts towards them and in spite of great arrogance and a humiliating behaviour shown by them, the Prophet (sws) persisted in preaching them. However, when their arrogance increased greatly and it became evident that these obdurate people would not reform themselves and in fact the time being wasted on them was at the cost of poor Muslims who had already embraced faith and for their education were more worthy of the Prophet's attention than these arrogant leaders, he was stopped from going after them. For this change in strategy, a very opportune chance was created by the incident of 'Abdullāh ibn Umm Maktūm (rta).

وَمَا يُدْرِيكَ لَعَلَّهُ يَزَكِّي (٣) أَوْ يَذَّكَّرُ فَتَنْفَعَهُ الذِّكْرَى (٤)²

The previous verses just inform us of an incident without telling us who is discussed in this incident and what the purpose of mentioning it is. The word يُدْرِيكَ (you know) shows that this incident relates to the Prophet (sws) and that he is being informed that at times he goes so far in search for lost sheep that he becomes indifferent to the sheep of his own herd.

The absence of address in the initial verses do raise the question in the mind of the reader as to who the incident relates to; however, as the addressee has not been specified, the reader surmises that since he is not addressed, there is nothing to worry about. Consequently, a question regarding the addressee of this incident must have instantly arisen in the mind of the Prophet (sws); however, in the absence of any specific addressee there was no cause of worry for him. On the contrary, had the addressee been specified, this rebuke would have become very severe. The reason is that in this situation it would have become certain that the Prophet (sws) had been chided because he became coarse at the arrival of a blind person whereas, as is explained earlier with more details forthcoming, this was not the case.

In the current verses, the addressee is specified because here the incident which called for rebuke has been described: this rebuke was not because the Prophet (sws) was in anyway slack in an obligation; it was because he was over-concerned and over-zealous in discharging an obligation. I have explained at many places in this *tafsīr* that the errors committed by the prophets of God are never because of base desires; at times, they become

2. And what do you know that he might have sought to reform himself or might have heard the counsel and this counsel might have benefited him.

over enthusiastic in seeking the pleasure of God and exceed their bounds of duty in this regard. For example, when Moses (sws) was called by the Almighty to mount Tūr, He even fixed a specific date for it; however, Moses (sws) in his fervour could not wait for the specified time and reached earlier. When he was called to explain his behaviour, he replied that he had come early because of his zeal to please the Almighty. Obviously, such an omission is based on an enthusiasm which is very commendable. However, since the prophets of God are a standard for truth and justice, the Almighty checks them on such oversights also so that the standards they set must not in anyway be wavered.

The Almighty has checked the Prophet (sws) here on a similar lapse. Since the Prophet (sws) was expecting that once the leaders of the Quraysh would embrace faith the message of Islam would influence the whole of Arabia, he became deeply involved in his preaching endeavour. He even became indifferent to his own comfort as a result. He did not even realize what these leaders were doing to him and his mission. Such was the extent of his involvement that it was feared that he would be able to find little time for the education and instruction of the poor people who had embraced faith. The Qur'ān has affectionately chided him at a number of places and informed him that he had taken much more upon himself than the responsibility that was imposed upon him by the Almighty regarding the Quraysh. He should not fret over them. All he was required to do was to present the message of God which he had done and that no further pampering was required. It was in these circumstances that the incident of 'Abdullāh ibn Umm Maktūm (rta) took place because of which a decisive *sūrah* was revealed in this matter.

The words وَمَا يُدْرِيكَ لَعَلَّهُ يَزَّكَّى (and what do you know that he might have sought to reform himself) point to the fact that the arrival of a blind man in a gathering of the Prophet (sws) dismayed him; this was because he perhaps thought that this would strike at the vanity of the leadership of Quraysh present, and they would shy away even though while pampering them he had become indifferent to a true student. So, the verse directs him to not go after instructing such unworthy people at the cost of a companion more worthy of his time.

It is also evident from these words that the real objective of the messengers of God is to spiritually purify their followers. Those who come to him for this purpose are the ones really worthy of his attention and affection. Others, who have no urge in them to reform themselves have no importance with regard to the objective of the preaching mission of the messengers however much important they may be otherwise.

Here, two qualities of a fervent person are mentioned: he is desirous of his inner-purification and he is one who benefits from being reminded.

Here, in fact, the characteristics of people who truly wanted to be instructed and reformed by the Prophet (sws) are mentioned. Generally, there were two types of people among them: one, people who had a question regarding their instruction and training and would come to the Prophet (sws) to seek guidance on it; two, people who had no such question in mind but would come to the Prophet (sws) to hear any words of guidance uttered by him or to benefit from the answer he may give to someone else. The words لَعَلَّهٗ يَرْكَبُ point to the first of these categories and the words يَذْكُرْ فَتَنْفَعَهُ الذِّكْرُ to the second. Both these attitudes are adopted by true students and the purpose of mentioning them is to let people know that anyone who wants to come to the gathering of the Prophet (sws) should come while keeping either of these two objectives in mind and it will be such people who would be worthy of his attention. As far as people who want to be pampered are concerned, they should sit at home and wait for their fate.

أَمَّا مَنْ اسْتَعْنَى (٥) فَأَنْتَ لَهُ تَصَدَّى (٦) وَمَا عَلَيْكَ أَلَّا يَرْكَبُ (٧) وَأَمَّا مَنْ جَاءَكَ يَسْعَى (٨) وَهُوَ يَخْشَى (٩) فَأَنْتَ عَنْهُ تَلَهَّى (١٠)³

These verses depict the real admonition which was sounded to the Prophet (sws) at that time. Only the God-fearing who have the urge to reform themselves are worthy of his attention. It is such people who are his real responsibility and he has no obligation to others.

The word تَصَدَّى is actually تَصَدَّدَ which is from the root صدد and it means “parallel” and “opposite”. The change in its morphological form is as per grammatical principles; examples of such a change can be seen in previous *sūrahs*. The implication is that the Prophet (sws) is anxious to convince people who show indifference, even though the Almighty has not made him accountable for them.

The verse وَمَا عَلَيْكَ أَلَّا يَرْكَبُ says that the real responsibility of the Prophet (sws) is to warn people of the Hereafter and to communicate to them the true message of Islam; once he has done this, he has done what is required of him. He is not responsible to necessarily make them Muslims. This topic is discussed in the previous *sūrahs* in various styles and at every place its purpose is to clarify to the Prophet (sws) that he should not burden himself with more than what he has been made liable to. He should not put himself in stress because these unfortunate people

3. He who shows indifference, you go after him even though you are not responsible if he does not reform himself; and he who comes to you with zeal and also fears God, you show indifference to him.

do not want to reform themselves; he should just leave them to face the consequences.

The word يَسْعَى in the verse وَأَمَّا مَنْ جَاءَكَ يَسْعَى means to do something with zeal and enthusiasm. It does not necessarily incorporate the meaning of “running around” in it. The verse: (٩: ٦٢) وَاسْعَوْا إِلَىٰ ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ means “turn to the word of God with zeal and fervour.” In the verse under discussion, this word has come in this meaning. The implication is that they come to the Prophet (sws) with the fervour of a thirsty person approaching a fountain.

The verse وَأَمَّا مَنْ اسْتَعْجَى is in contrast to وَهُوَ يَخْشَى. On the one hand are people who are so engrossed in the pleasures and lures of this world that they are never bothered to think whether there is life after this life and whether one should prepare for it. On the other hand, there are people who fear meeting God in the Hereafter. It is this second category of people and not the first from which it can be expected that they will pay full heed to what the Prophet (sws) tells them. However, the Prophet (sws) is after the first trying to accomplish the impossible whereas he is not finding time for those who are ready to accept what he tells them.

The following things become evident from these verses:

Firstly, the admonition sounded in these verses which apparently seems directed at the Prophet (sws) is actually directed at the unworthy leaders of the Qurasyh from whom there was no hope of the right attitude. Hence it became necessary that the Prophet (sws) ignore them and make the poor Muslims the real focus of his attention. For they were the ones who had embraced faith and were actually worthy of his preaching efforts.

Secondly, the Prophet (sws) has not been checked for being irresponsible in any manner; he has actually been checked for burdening himself with much more than the responsibility actually imposed on him by the Almighty. Besides other examples, one example of such an affectionate admonition can be seen in the following verse: لَعَلَّكَ بَاخِعٌ نَفْسَكَ أَلَّا يَكُونُوا مُؤْمِنِينَ (٣:٢٦) (you will perhaps fret yourself that they are not becoming believers, (26:3)).

Thirdly, the Prophet (sw) has been guided that the real asset of Islam are the poor Muslims who are instilled with the fear of God and not the affluent whose hearts are devoid of the fear of God. Therefore, he should primarily direct his attention to them and not waste his time on those for whom there is no hope for any reformation.

Imām Hamīd al-Dīn Farāhī in his exegesis on Sūrah 'Abas has explained the reproach found in this address in a very lucid manner. He writes:

An example would perhaps serve to illustrate the point further.

Consider a very conscientious and vigilant shepherd who is looking for one of his well-bred sheep that has wandered off from the main herd; he sets out to find it and at every step he sees its footsteps; he is also able to hear its voice coming from some corner of the jungle; thinking that success is near, he wanders far off and becomes neglectful of his herd. When he returns, his master rebukes him for this negligence saying: "You have spent a lot of time in needlessly looking for a foolish goat; you should have left it to die in the wilderness or become prey to some hound; such a crazy animal does not deserve your attention." Who is rebuked here? The shepherd or the lost sheep? Likewise, in these verses, it seems that it is the Prophet (sws) who has been rebuked; however, actually, it is the Quraysh who have been rebuked though they have not been directly addressed. For the Prophet (sws), there are several aspects of affection and fondness concealed in this rebuke.⁴

كَلَّا إِنَّهَا تَذْكِرَةٌ (١١) فَمَنْ شَاءَ ذَكَرْهُ (١٢)⁵

The negation implies that the Prophet (sws) should not go after such people who do not value his message. It is upon a person to be reminded by the Qur'ān, which is no more than a reminder. He who has no intention to be reminded by it should get ready to face the consequences it is informing people of. In other words, the responsibility of the Prophet (sws) is to only communicate this reminder to people; it is not his responsibility to force it down on them; he is merely required to warn them and not pamper them.

The antecedent of the pronoun in *إِنَّهَا* and *ذَكَرْهُ* is *ذِكْرِي* which occurs in verse four. In the latter, the masculine pronoun has come with regard to the Qur'ān. Since *تَذْكِرَةٌ* and *ذِكْرِي* both refer to the Qur'ān, by bringing the masculine pronoun the objective is to refer to the real meaning. Examples of such usage can be seen in previous *sūrahs*.

It is evident from this discussion, as explained earlier, that if there is an element of rebuke in this address it is affection-oriented. The rebuke thus implies that he has burdened himself with much more responsibility than was actually assigned to him.

A part of the discourse is suppressed after *فَمَنْ شَاءَ ذَكَرْهُ*. If it is revealed, the discourse would read something like this: "Whoever wants, he can benefit from this reminder and whoever wants, he can remain deaf to its

4. Farāhī, *Majmū'ah tafāsīr*, 2nd ed. (Lahore: Faran Foundation, 1998), 257.

5. Certainly not! This is but a reminder; so whoever wishes, can be reminded through it.

calls.” At another place, this fact is stated thus: *فَمَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُؤْمِنْ وَمَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُكْفُرْ* (then whoever wants can profess belief and whoever wants can profess disbelief, (18:29)).

فِي صُحُفٍ مُّكَرَّمَةٍ (١٣) مَرْفُوعَةٍ مُّطَهَّرَةٍ (١٤) بِأَيْدِي سَفَرَةٍ (١٥) كِرَامٍ بَرَرَةٍ (١٦)⁶

This is a further explanation of the above-mentioned directive given to the Prophet (sws) to disregard and ignore the arrogant leadership of the Quraysh. The implication is that just as it is not befitting for him to accede to these disbelievers, similarly, what he is presenting before them is not something which should be presented to them by begging and beseeching them; it is in fact a very exalted, lofty and honourable thing. It is not like some defective merchandise so that the Prophet (sws) has to worry about selling it in whatever way possible and go as far as to coax and lure buyers into buying it. It is in fact a pearl and ruby from among the treasures of the Almighty which he is dispensing free of cost. If these people are not valuing it, they are not harming the Prophet (sws) in any way; they are only taking their selves to eternal doom.

The words *فِي صُحُفٍ مُّكَرَّمَةٍ* express the exaltedness and majesty of the discourse. Here the inchoative (*mubtadā*) is suppressed; the sentence actually is: *هُوَ فِي صُحُفٍ مُّكَرَّمَةٍ*. When more adjectives of a noun are to be mentioned subsequently, it is customary in Arabic to suppress the inchoative.

The word *صَحِيفَةً* refers to a written page. When used in the plural form (*صُحُف*), it, at times, refers to a book. Here, it refers to the guarded tablet and the adjective *مُكَرَّمَةٍ* shows that it is a powerful and priceless treasure which is being guarded by the angels of God with great diligence. This is a reference to the fact that neither is it accessible to everyone nor everyone has the permission to access it or take something from it; it is God who bestows it upon those He wants to and He has blessed the Prophet (sws) from this treasure and he should only present it before those who are worthy of it. He should not cast pearls before a swine. The Gospel has very effectively mentioned this teaching and I have referred to it earlier at some place in this *tafsīr*.

The adjectives *مَرْفُوعَةٍ مُّطَهَّرَةٍ* also occur to explain *مُكَرَّمَةٍ*. The former refers to exaltedness both in meaning and status and at another place is explained thus: *وَإِنَّهُ فِي أُمِّ الْكِتَابِ لَدَيْنَا لَعَلِّ حَكِيمٌ* (٤:٤٣) (it is with us in the original book, exalted and full of wisdom, (43:4)).

The purpose of the adjective *مُطَهَّرَةٍ* is to bring to light the fact that the

6. In esteemed pages, exalted and untouched, in the custody of scribes, honourable and faithful.

Qur'ān is safe and secure from the incursions of devils and evil spirits. For example, it is said: (٥٦: ٧٨-٧٩) *فِي كِتَابٍ مَّكْنُونٍ لَا يَمَسُّهُ إِلَّا الْمُطَهَّرُونَ* (it is in a secure book which is only accessible to the pure, (56:78-79)).

The words *سَفَرَةٌ كِرَامٍ بَارَّةٍ* delineate the characteristics of scribes in whose custody this secure book has been given by God. What is stated negatively in 56:79 quoted above is stated here positively. What is said overall can be stated thus: Evil spirits and devils have no access to this secure Book; on the contrary, it is in the custody of angels who are pure, faithful and highly respected.

The word *سَفَرَةٌ* is a plural of *سَافِرٌ* and means “a reader” and “a scribe”. It connotes both reading and writing. If one reflects on its etymology, one comes to the conclusion that it was originally meant for writing and later its meaning was extended to include reading and stating something.

The word *كِرَامٍ* refers to their high status and noble character; they are such exalted and honourable beings that there is no possibility of any dishonesty from them. Neither can they take out anything from it nor can they allow the jinn and the devils to have access to it.

The word *بَارَّةٍ* is a plural of *بَارٌّ*. It means “obedient, faithful and responsible”. This adjective further highlights their quality of being trustworthy. At one place, it is said: (٢٦: ١٩٣) *نَزَلَ بِهِ الرُّوحُ الْأَمِينُ* (this word has been brought down by the faithful Spirit, (26:193)). At another place, it is further explained thus:

إِنَّهُ لَقَوْلُ رَسُولٍ كَرِيمٍ ذِي قُوَّةٍ عِنْدَ ذِي الْعَرْشِ مَكِينٍ مُطَاعٍ ثَمَّ أَمِينٍ (٨١: ١٩-٢١)

This is the word brought by a noble messenger; he is endued with great power and held in honour before the Lord of the throne; he is obeyed and is very trustworthy. (81:19-21)

The purpose of mentioning these attributes of the Qur'ān and of its custodians is, as mentioned earlier, to direct the attention of the Prophet (sws) to the fact that the Qur'ān should not be presented to people by begging and imploring them; it should be presented with honour and dignity, which is the very hallmark of the Book itself. Similarly, just as the Almighty has entrusted it to honourable and noble angels, the Prophet (sws) and his Companions (rta) too should uphold this honour and dignity in their preaching.

Also evident from this is the fact that the archangel whom the Almighty has selected for the deliverance of revelation and the scribes who are entrusted with its writing all have a lofty character and carry out their responsibilities with great honesty and integrity. In other words, only those people in this earth are selected to transmit and deliver this

word of God who have the same qualities and attributes which are found in the angels to carry out this service in the heavens.

قُتِلَ الْإِنْسَانُ مَا أَكْفَرَهُ⁷(١٧)

Though a general word *الْإِنْسَانُ* (man) is used here, the address is directed at the arrogant leadership of the Quraysh mentioned in the earlier verses. I have explained at various instances of this *tafsīr* that at times the discourse is addressed to a certain person or a group; however, this address is couched in general words and they are not directly addressed. Such an address expresses the disgust of the speaker. The verse under discussion is an example of such an address. The implication is: “this man is a strange creature; woe to him on his ungratefulness; such is the state of his impudence and foolishness that he desires that if the word of God be recited out to him it should be recited out in a submissive and subservient manner.” The style *مَا أَكْفَرَهُ* both reflects wonder and disgust.

مِنْ أَيِّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقَهُ (١٨) مِنْ نُطْفَةٍ خَلَقَهُ فَقَدَرَهُ (١٩) ثُمَّ السَّبِيلَ يَسَّرَهُ (٢٠) ثُمَّ أَمَاتَهُ فَأَقْبَرَهُ (٢١) ثُمَّ إِذَا شَاءَ أَنْشَرَهُ⁸(٢٢)

In these verses, the pride and vanity of these people is condemned. The method adopted is to allude in small sentences to the creation of man, the substance from which he is created, the stages of his creation, the sources of life and its objective, death, grave and being raised up again. In this manner, the transience of their pride is made evident to them and while reflecting on their life they are also able to see the reward and punishment they are being informed of by the Qur'ān.

The question posed by the words *مِنْ أَيِّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقَهُ* is also to express humiliation and to direct attention to life after death. These arrogant people haughtily believed that just as they have been blessed with respect and leadership, if ever there is to be a Day of Judgement, there too they would be blessed with a similar status. It is because of this notion that the warning sounded by the Prophet (sws) would weigh down heavily upon them. They would say that the Prophet (sws) is warning them of being thrown into Hell and giving glad tidings to the poor paupers of being blessed with Paradise – paupers who would serve them and who they

7. Woe to man! How ungrateful he is!

8. From what was he created? From a drop of fluid. He created him and then measured out for him. Then eased out the path for him. He then gave him death; then He had him put in a grave. Then whenever He intends, He will raise him to life.

never even considered worthy enough to sit in their company. The Qur'ān has attacked this notion of theirs in the following words:

فَمَالِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا قَبْلَكَ مُهْطِعِينَ عَنِ الْيَمِينِ وَعَنِ الشِّمَالِ عِزِينَ أَيُّضَمُ كُلُّ امْرِئٍ
مَنْهُمْ أَنْ يُدْخَلَ جَنَّةَ نَعِيمٍ كَلَّا إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاهُمْ مِمَّا يَعْلَمُونَ (٣٩-٣٦: ٧٠)

Then what is the matter with these disbelievers that they rush madly at you in multitudes from right and left? Does each man among them expect to enter the garden of bliss. By no means! We have created them out of what they know. (70:36-39)

Readers may take a look at the *tafsīr* of these verses in *Tadabbur-i Qur'ān*. The implication is that it is not befitting for creatures born from a dirty (*najis*) fluid to boast of their purity and superiority and thereby regard themselves to be entitled to Paradise.

Similarly, the Qur'ān at various places has cited the creation and phases of man's creation to substantiate the fact that the God who can create a human being from a trivial drop of liquid can easily re-create him after he dies. This topic is mentioned in the Qur'ān in various styles. I will content myself in citing the following verses from Sūrah Mu'minūn:

وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ سُلَالَةٍ مِّنْ طِينٍ ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَاهُ نُطْفَةً فِي قَرَارٍ مَّكِينٍ ثُمَّ
خَلَقْنَا النُّطْفَةَ عَلَقَةً فَخَلَقْنَا الْعَلَقَةَ مُضْغَةً فَخَلَقْنَا الْمُضْغَةَ عِظَامًا فَكَسَوْنَا الْعِظَامَ
لَحْمًا ثُمَّ أَنْشَأْنَاهُ خَلْقًا آخَرَ فَتَبَارَكَ اللَّهُ أَحْسَنُ الْخَالِقِينَ ثُمَّ إِنَّكُمْ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ لَمَيِّتُونَ
ثُمَّ إِنَّكُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ تُبْعَثُونَ (١٦-١٢: ٢٣)

And We first created man from an essence of clay: then placed him in the form of a drop of water in a secure place. Then We made the drop into a clot of blood, and then made the clot a lump of flesh. This We fashioned into bones, then clothed the bones with flesh, and then gave it an entirely new form. Blessed be God, the noblest of creators. Then after this you shall surely die and be restored to life on the Day of Judgement. (23:12-16)

Consider next the expression *مِنْ نُطْفَةٍ*. Since the answer posed in the previous verse "from what has he been created" was absolutely evident and none could refute it, the Qur'ān has itself answered the question that man was created from a drop of water. At another place in the Qur'ān (77:20), this water is called *مَهِينٌ* (insignificant and despicable). In other words, it is neither a rare thing nor invaluable as regards its price. So

how is it befitting for man who has been created with such an impure drop of fluid to boast and brag.

After a mention of the inconsequential nature of the drop from which man has been created, the next part of the verse *حَلَقَهُ فَقَدَّرَهُ* refers to the measuring out, planning and easing out evident in the creation of man and in the various stages of his life. Evident from his creation and these stages of life is the fact that grandeur and majesty shown by providence in fashioning a drop of fluid into a complete human being cannot be without a meaning and purpose. In fact, it is essential that a day come wherein it judges him, evaluates the good and evil done by him and then select those who conform to its standards and cast those into fire who fall below these standards.

The word *فَقَدَّرَهُ* refers to the gradual stages and phases of man's life. Just as while referring to the waxing and waning of the moon the Qur'ān has said: *وَالْقَمَرَ قَدَرْنَا مَنَازِلَ* (We have ordained phases for the moon, (36:39)), in a similar manner, this word directs our attention to the various stages of life through which he gradually passes from childhood to youth to old age. The above quoted verses of Sūrah Mu'minūn also refer to this subject and here in the succeeding verses some of its aspects are delineated. It is obvious that this gradual progress bears evidence to the power and wisdom of God and the thoroughness present in the creation of man. In turn, this power and thoroughness bear witness to the fact that man is not a purposeless creation; he has been created for a great purpose which self-evidently entails that he be raised to life once again after death, called to account and then be rewarded or punished accordingly. Simultaneously, the power of God evident in the creation of man bears indisputable evidence that creating him again after death is not at all something impossible.

While explaining the verse *ثُمَّ السَّبِيلَ يَسَّرَهُ* our exegetes generally say that it refers to the easing out which providence has ordained in the body of the mother and her child for delivery and which comes to the help of both exactly at the time it is needed. This is quite true. Undoubtedly, if this thing does not happen from providence at the right time there is nothing to substitute it; in fact, there is a possibility that both the child and the mother die of suffocation. However, in my opinion, there is no need to narrow down the scope of easing out to such an extent. Just as the child in its mother's womb grows and is nourished because of the planning and ease provided by providence, in a similar manner it goes through the ups and downs of life from its birth to death because of the ease and guidance provided by providence. It is this ease and facility provided by God because of which the breasts of a mother become laden with milk for the

nourishment of a child after she gives birth to it and the child itself is instinctively guided to suck them. Similarly, during youth also while undertaking various tasks and achieving success in various aspects of life he uses the limbs and means blessed by God and benefits from the intellect and guidance bestowed upon him by the Almighty. In Sūrah A'ḷā this aspect of the Almighty's grandeur is mentioned thus: **الَّذِي خَلَقَ فَسَوَّىٰ وَالَّذِي قَدَّرَ فَهَدَىٰ (87:2-3)** (Who made a sketch and then perfected it, and Who set their destinies and then gave guidance, (87:2-3)).

Similar is the situation of the soul and the morals ordained in it. The Qur'ān says:

وَنَفْسٍ وَمَا سَوَّاهَا فَأَلْهَمَهَا فُجُورَهَا وَتَقْوَاهَا قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ زَكَّاهَا وَقَدْ خَابَ مَنْ دَسَّاهَا (91:7-10)

And bears witness the soul and the perfection given to it; then inspired it with its evil and its good that he succeeded who purified it and he failed who corrupted it. (91:7-10))

In short, whether it is the spiritual aspect of life or material, the Almighty eased out the way for man. If he treads this path, he will never stumble; however, by wrongly using his free will when he adopts the wrong path, he is doomed.

The expression **ثُمَّ أَمَاتَهُ فَأَقْبَرَهُ** is a reference to the last phase of life. A time comes when the Almighty gives him death and has him put in a grave. Death is the most certain reality for a living being once he comes in this world. Such are the laws of this world in which providence has enchained man that no one can escape death. The Almighty's shot always hits the bull's eye.

أَقْبَرَهُ means "to put someone in the grave or to bury him". Found in this word is a subtle reference to the fact that death does not destroy a person; he is given in the custody of the earth by providence. What is given in custody has to be returned one day. Consequently, when the time comes, the Almighty will take back what was consigned to the earth's custody.

In the expression **ثُمَّ إِذَا شَاءَ أَنْشَرَهُ** the word **أَنْشَرَهُ** means "to open, to scatter, to disperse and to raise up anew". The implication is that whenever the Almighty wants, He will raise up man. This He will do with the greatest of ease. When in the womb of a mother He was able to fashion out a human being from a drop of water without the slightest of bother, how can it be difficult for Him to retrieve human beings buried in the earth.

كَلَّا لَمَّا يَقِضْ مَا أَمَرُهُ⁹ (٢٣)

This verse is in parallel to the above quoted verse: قُتِلَ الْإِنْسَانُ مَا أَكْفَرَهُ (Woe to man! How ungrateful he is!). It has been explained that this verse expresses wonder at the obduracy of these obdurate people and then the Day of Judgement is corroborated through man's existence – the Day which he was regarding as an impossibility. Similarly, in the verse under discussion, these people are rebuked at their idiocy and then the Day of Judgement is corroborated on the basis of the great system of providence which is found around man and which by its very existence bears witness to the fact that the Almighty who has blessed man with such favours will not leave him unaccountable; a day of accountability is certain to come for him.

Evident from the style of the expression لَمَّا يَقِضْ مَا أَمَرُهُ (he has still not complied with what his Lord had asked him) is that as far as teaching and communicating the reasons which entail the coming of such a day is concerned, it has been done in the most ultimate manner; however, these obstinate people are still adamant on their stance. Even now they are indifferent to the Day for whose preparation they are being asked.

Included in the words مَا أَمَرُهُ (what his Lord had asked him) are all the directives which are among self-evident realities of human nature and also the directives which the Almighty has revealed through His messengers for the guidance of people. I have already explained under: فَاتَّبِعُونِ مِنْ حَيْثُ أَمَرَكُمُ اللَّهُ (٢: ٢٢٢) (go to them from where God has enjoined you, (2:222)) how self-evident realities of human nature must be regarded as directives of God.

فَلْيَنْظُرِ الْإِنْسَانُ إِلَى طَعَامِهِ¹⁰ (٢٤)

The implication is that if they have not been able to understand the argument cited before them, then there are many other arguments also which substantiate the Day of Judgement. Man should only reflect on his food on which his life depends: he should look how the Almighty creates it and then with great abundance and variety while catering for multifarious needs makes it available in countless forms. In other words, if keeping aside obstinacy, man sincerely reflects on this state of affairs he will easily understand that re-creating him after death is not the least difficult for the Almighty. The very rain which is a means of his subsistence practically demonstrates this fact. He will also be able to

9. Certainly not! He has still not complied with what his Lord had asked him.

10. Thus man should reflect on his food.

understand that this tremendous system of providence and sustenance entails that man be held accountable before God one day. Such a day is bound to come when he will be asked if he fulfilled his obligation towards the favours bestowed upon him by the Almighty. It is but natural that every favour entail responsibility.

أَنَا صَبَبْنَا الْمَاءَ صَبًّا (٢٥) ثُمَّ شَقَقْنَا الْأَرْضَ شَقًّا (٢٦)¹¹

The Qur'ān has not only asked man to reflect on his food, it has also specified the course of this reflection. It is a consequence of God's power and mercy that rain is sent down in abundance and then in order to drench the earth its pores are opened. Neither is anyone else in the position to send down rain from the skies nor to open the pores of the earth whereas on these two factors depends all the benefits and services provided by the earth. This topic is discussed thus in Sūrah Anbiyā': أَنَّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ كَانَتَا رَتْقًا فَفَتَقْنَاهُمَا (٣٠:٢١) (that the heavens and the earth were but one solid mass which We tore asunder, (21:30)).

If one deliberates on the nature of man's creation mentioned in the above paragraph, one will realize the similarity between both arguments. There the argument began with the substantiation of the Day of Judgement and then after a mention of providence reached its culmination with the mention of accountability and reward and punishment. Here too, as will become evident from subsequent verses, the sequence of premises in the argument presented is the same. First, the mention of a comprehensive issue was instrumental in initiating the possibility of the Day of Judgement. After that, various signs of providence are brought into attention and then accountability and reward and punishment are presented as an obvious outcome to all this.

فَأَنْبَتْنَا فِيهَا حَبًّا (٢٧) وَعِنَبًا وَقَضْبًا (٢٨) وَزَيْتُونًا وَنَخْلًا (٢٩) وَحَدَائِقَ غُلْبًا (٣٠) وَفَاكِهَةً وَأَبًّا (٣١)¹²

Some very prominent blessings of the Almighty for the inhabitants of the earth produced as a result of interaction between the rain and the earth are referred to here. These things are ones which the foremost addressees of the Qur'ān were well aware of and which occupy primary importance in nourishing the needs of man.

Firstly, things which are attached or are born spread out on the earth

11. That We poured forth water in abundance then cleaved the earth asunder.

12. Then produced in it grain, grapes, vegetables, olives, dates, dense orchards, fruits and herbage as means of sustenance for you and your cattle.

and whose observation does not require that the sight be lifted from the earth are referred to. For example grain, grapes and vegetables. Grain is the most important thing for nourishment; all other things come under it and that is why it is mentioned the foremost. After grain, the next most important thing needed for human nourishment and growth is fruit and the king of all fruits is grapes; it is thus mentioned as an example of a fruit. After this, vegetables which are spread on the earth are mentioned and with grain are used as curry, some in raw form and some in cooked form. Although the word قَضْبُ is mostly used for vegetables which are eaten raw and are regarded as ready-to-eat, however other vegetables are also connoted by this word.

After this, certain other blessings are mentioned which are obtained from the trees which extend into the sky and which need that the sight be lifted for their observation. As an example, dates and olives are mentioned. The importance olive has in producing oil is well-known. The Qur'ān mentions its nourishing ability and Sūrah Nūr mentions a parable which describes lamps which are lit up by this oil.

After this, dates are mentioned. To the Arabs dates were an amalgam of multifarious benefits and blessings. For them, they were dry-fruits which are rich in nutritional value and very lucrative to stock. Moreover, they would also make a very tasty juice from it.

After a mention of things of specific importance, general orchards are mentioned by the words حَدَائِقُ غُلْبًا. The word حَدِيقَةٌ refers to an enclosed orchard. The word غُلْبٌ is a plural of أَغْلَبَ and means someone having a thick neck. When this word is used for an orchard the purpose is to point to the lushness of the trees. If an orchard is luxuriant, the expanse of the trees would necessarily increase and their upper portions would overlap.

In the expression وَأَبَّاءُ فَاكِهَةٍ the general is made even more general so that the sphere of favours of the Almighty for man is extended to animals as well which directly or indirectly are of use to him.

Earlier, only specific fruits are mentioned by name and here by mentioning the word فَاكِهَةٍ all fruits are referred to whether they are found in Arabia or in other countries whether they are of high pedigree or ordinary and whether they are reserved for birds or for animals.

Moreover, earlier only those favours are mentioned which man is blessed with whereas besides him there are four-legged beasts also on which man is not only dependent but also need looking after like man; however, nothing is mentioned for them specially. Here that lack of mention has been made up for by mentioning the word أَبَّاءُ.

The word أَبَّاءُ means vegetation and lush grass. For consumption of the four-legged beasts is the husk also which is separated from the grain;

however, it is something very ordinary; here what needs to be mentioned is something of the same value and importance as fruits are for man. Fresh lush green grass is made widely available to animals and it is also a substitute for them for the fruits and vegetables which man consumes.

Imām Hamīd al-Dīn Farāhī has deeply researched into the meaning of أَبٌ in his *tafsīr* of Sūrah ‘Abas and proven that it is a very common Arabic word and that it is not correct that Abū Bakr (rta) or ‘Umar (rta) did not know the meaning of this word, as is mentioned in certain narratives. This research is very thorough and if anyone has any doubts about this word, he can look up his *tafsīr*.¹³

¹⁴ مَتَاعًا لَكُمْ وَلِأَنْعَامِكُمْ (٣٢)

The fact that all these things are beneficial to man is very obvious and there is also no doubt that all these favours are a manifestation of God’s graciousness to man; he should therefore think that do not these favours impose a responsibility on him. This last premise though not mentioned in words is evident from the context. This is because it is discussed in the previous verses that these stubborn and conceited people are not showing ingratitude to God because His rights are not evident to them or because they do not realize what their responsibilities are; the fact of the matter is that because of their own arrogance and haughtiness they deliberately do not want to hear or accept anything which is against their desires.

¹⁵ فَإِذَا جَاءَتِ الصَّاخَّةُ (٣٣)

The word صَّاخَّةٌ means “a deafening blast or roar”. Just as in Sūrah Nāzi‘āt the word used is طَامَّةٌ, the word صَّاخَّةٌ is used in this *sūrah* to convey the same meaning. These words actually point to the fact that the very first shout of the trumpet will be so horrifying that it will deafen the ears.

The answer to the conditional clause that begins with إِذَا (when) is suppressed because it is obvious from the context, as is explained in verses 30-35 of Sūrah Nāzi‘āt. The implication is that today these people are receiving the warning of the Prophet (sws) with deaf ears but what will they do when the caller deputed by the Almighty will call from such a nearby place that his voice will make them deaf.

13. Farāhī, *Majmū‘ah tafāsīr*, 269-270.

14. As means of sustenance for you and your cattle.

15. So when the deafening blast comes!

يَوْمَ يَفِرُّ الْمَرْءُ مِنْ أَخِيهِ (٣٤) وَأُمِّهِ وَأَبِيهِ (٣٥) وَصَاحِبَتِهِ وَبَنِيهِ (٣٦) لِكُلِّ امْرِئٍ مِنْهُمْ
يَوْمَئِذٍ شَأْنٌ يُغْنِيهِ (٣٧)¹⁶

These verses depict the horror of that day. It must be kept in mind that the words: *يَوْمَ يَفِرُّ الْمَرْءُ مِنْ أَخِيهِ وَأُمِّهِ وَأَبِيهِ وَصَاحِبَتِهِ وَبَنِيهِ* do not form an answer to the conditional clause mentioned in the previous verse. Had they constituted the answer, linguistic principles dictate that its style should have been different. The answer is suppressed as is explained under the relevant verses of Sūrah Nāzi'āt; however, these words do subtly indicate the suppressed answer. In other words, today these people have shut their ears to the warnings sounded to them by the Prophet (sws) and the real reason for this is that their pride in the strength and authority of their family and tribe has blinded them; they reckon that no one can displace or destroy them; however, the day heralded by this deafening roar will be so horrifying that everyone will forget about his surroundings and will only think of his own self. Neither a brother will hear the imploring of his brother nor a son will care for the pleadings of his parents and nor will anyone have the courage to share the hardships faced by his wife and sons. Everyone will be so concerned about his own self on that day that the thought of others will not even cross his mind even though that person may be a very close relative of his.

This topic is discussed in Sūrah Ma'ārij in the following words:

وَلَا يَسْأَلُ حَمِيمٌ حَمِيمًا يُبْصَرُونَهُمْ يَوْمَ الْمُجْرِمِ لَوْ يَفْتَدِي مِنْ عَذَابِ يَوْمِئِذٍ بَنِيهِ
وَصَاحِبَتِهِ وَأَخِيهِ وَفَصِيلَتِهِ الَّتِي تُؤْوِيهِ وَمَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ جَمِيعًا ثُمَّ يُنْجِيهِ (٧٠: ١-١٤)

On that day, no sincere friend shall inquire after his friend [though] they shall be shown to one another. The sinner will long to redeem himself from the torment of that Day by offering his sons, his wife, his brother, his family who used to give him shelter and all the people of the earth as ransom and then save himself from it. (70:1-14)

The only difference between these two sets of verses is that in the one under discussion the sequence of relatives mentioned is from distant to near and in this one it is vice versa.

16. On that Day, man will flee from his brother, mother, father, his wife and his sons. Every one on the Day will be concerned with his own self.

وُجُوهُ يَوْمَئِذٍ مُّسْفِرَةٌ (٣٨) ضَاحِكَةٌ مُّسْتَبْشِرَةٌ (٣٩) وَوُجُوهُ يَوْمَئِذٍ عَلَيْهَا غَبَرَةٌ (٤٠)
تَرَاهُهَا قَاسٍ (٤١) أُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْكَافِرَةُ الْفَجَرَةُ (٤٢)¹⁷

Here, at the end, the difference between the believers and disbelievers which will be evident from their faces is briefly indicated so that from this observable difference one can have an idea of their inner-selves. This of course will reflect the hopes and grit with which the hearts of the believers will be replete and also reflect what will be going on in the hearts of the disbelievers.

The word مُّسْفِرَةٌ means “shining” and “bright”. This meaning emanates from the idiom أَسْفَرَ الصُّبْحُ. This word indicates the very first radiance of joy which will appear on the faces of the dwellers of Paradise.

The word ضَاحِكَةٌ also denotes joy and happiness.

The word مُّسْتَبْشِرَةٌ denotes freshness.

The state of the disbelievers is depicted by the words: وَوُجُوهُ يَوْمَئِذٍ عَلَيْهَا غَبَرَةٌ: their faces will be dark and gloomy because they would have lost all hope.

The words أُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْكَافِرَةُ الْفَجَرَةُ at the end actually briefly refer to the charge-sheet of these criminals: they will reach this state because in the previous world they persisted to show ingratitude to God and remained arrogant and disobedient to Him.

By the grace of God, the *tafsīr* of this *sūrah* comes to an end. وَهُوَ الْمَوْفَّقُ لِلصَّوَابِ (only He guides to what is right).

Rahmānabād,

21st May, 1979 AD

23rd Jumādī al-Thānī, 1399 AH

17. Many a face on that day will be bright, smiling and rejoicing, and many a face on that day will be gloomy and dark. These very disbelievers, these insolent.

Sūrah Takwīr

Central Theme and Relationship with the Preceding Sūrah

This *sūrah* portrays the horrors of the Day of Judgement mentioned in the previous two *sūrahs* – ‘Abas and Nāzi‘āt – by the names *ṭāmmah* and *ṣākhkhah*. The effects of this horror and fright on the heavens and the earth and on the objects between them as well as on the world around man and that within him are portrayed. Such is the potent manner of this portrayal that if a person has a discerning mind he can see all that is today concealed from his eyes but will one day be revealed to him.

The disbelievers of the Quraysh are then addressed and told that they should pay heed to the warnings of the Qur’ān about this day and prepare for it. The Qur’ān is from God and He has revealed it to His Prophet through His most trustworthy and favoured angel. If they are rejecting it by considering it to be the work of poets and soothsayers, then they should remember that they will neither be able to harm God nor His Prophet (sws); this attitude will only lead them to their own doom. A messenger is only responsible to remind people of this day. After this, it is up to people to accept or reject it. They should also remember that only those people will be blessed with the urge to profess faith in this Book who truly value and honour the truth. This is an established practice of God and there can be no change in it.

Analysis of the Sūrah

In the first six verses of the *sūrah*, the circumstances which will arise before the dead are brought back to life are depicted.

Verses (1-3): What will befall the great and grand things of this world like the sun, the moon and the mountains is portrayed.

Verses (4-6): The manner in which each and every thing on this earth will only be concerned about its own self is briefly mentioned. The most cherished and favourite of things will be abandoned. Fearing the tempestuous seas, wild beasts from various forests and burrows will gather together. The lion and the deer will be near one another but except for the common calamity they would be encountering, their sense will register nothing else.

After this, in the next eight verses circumstances which will arise after the dead are brought back to life are portrayed.

Verses (7-14): People will be categorized on the basis of their beliefs and deeds and the innocent and oppressed will be delivered justice; the accounts of people will be unveiled; the heavens will turn red and Hell will be ignited further; Paradise will be brought near those who have become entitled to it and each person will see what he has brought before His Lord.

Verses (15-18): Falling stars and the advent of dawn after night bear witness that the Qur'ān is not of the genre of ludicrous chants of the soothsayers. It has been brought down by a grand angel of God who is regarded very powerful and honourable by Him; all angels obey him and he is very trustworthy and dependable.

Verses (22-26): The rejecters of the Qur'ān are warned that the person who is reciting it out to them is not a mad or frenzied person; he is a messenger of God and a very sensible person; his claim of meeting an angel is based on reality; he has seen that angel in the open horizon; he is not greedy of the unseen; the revelations which come to him are involuntary and are from God. Foolish are the people who regard these revelations to be the discourse of the accursed Satan and are denying the warnings they give.

Verses (27-29): Another warning is sounded to the disbelievers that if they continue with their stubborn behaviour, they will neither be able to harm the Almighty nor His Prophet (sws) and will only call for their own doom. The discourse which is being recited to them is a reminder; it is up to them to benefit from it or not. Neither is it the responsibility of the Prophet (sws) to force it upon them nor is it the practice of God to force them to accept it. Only the hearts of those people will welcome this divine word who have the courage to adopt the right path and this courage will only find roots in those who according to the practice of God are worthy of it.

Text and Translation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

إِذَا الشَّمْسُ كُوِّرَتْ (١) وَإِذَا النُّجُومُ انْكَدَرَتْ (٢) وَإِذَا الْجِبَالُ سُيِّرَتْ (٣) وَإِذَا الْعِشَارُ
عُطِّلَتْ (٤) وَإِذَا الْوُحُوشُ حُشِرَتْ (٥) وَإِذَا الْبِحَارُ سُجِّرَتْ (٦) وَإِذَا النُّفُوسُ زُوِّجَتْ (٧)
وَإِذَا الْمَوْءُودَةُ سُئِلَتْ (٨) بِأَيِّ ذَنْبٍ قُتِلَتْ (٩) وَإِذَا الصُّحُفُ نُشِرَتْ (١٠) وَإِذَا السَّمَاءُ
كُشِطَتْ (١١) وَإِذَا الْجَحِيمُ سُعِّرَتْ (١٢) وَإِذَا الْجَنَّةُ أُزْلِفَتْ (١٣) عَلِمَتْ نَفْسٌ مَا أُخْصِرَتْ
(١٤) فَلَا أُقْسِمُ بِالْخُنُوسِ (١٥) الْجَوَارِي الْكُنُوسِ (١٦) وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا عَسَسَ (١٧) وَالصُّبْحِ إِذَا

تَنَقَّسَ (١٨) إِنَّهُ لَقَوْلُ رَسُولٍ كَرِيمٍ (١٩) ذِي قُوَّةٍ عِنْدَ ذِي الْعَرْشِ مَكِينٍ (٢٠) مُطَاعٍ ثَمَّ أَمِينٍ (٢١) وَمَا صَاحِبُكُمْ بِمَجْنُونٍ (٢٢) وَلَقَدْ رَآهُ بِالْأُفُقِ الْمُبِينِ (٢٣) وَمَا هُوَ عَلَى الْعَيْبِ بِضَنِينٍ (٢٤) وَمَا هُوَ بِقَوْلِ شَيْطَانٍ رَجِيمٍ (٢٥) فَأَيْنَ تَذْهَبُونَ (٢٦) إِنَّ هُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ لِلْعَالَمِينَ (٢٧) لِمَنْ شَاءَ مِنْكُمْ أَنْ يَسْتَقِيمَ (٢٨) وَمَا تَشَاءُونَ إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْعَالَمِينَ (٢٩)

In the name of Allah, the most Gracious, the ever Merciful.

When the sun is wrapped up and the stars are bedimmed; mountains are set in motion and camels ten-month pregnant wander unattended; wild beasts come together and the seas burst forth. (1-6)

When souls are grouped together and the infant girl, who was buried alive is asked for what sin was she slain; when the scrolls of deeds are laid open and the skies are stripped bare; when Hell is set ablaze and Paradise is brought near, then each soul will know what it has brought forward. (7-14)

Therefore, No! I swear by the stars which recede, move forward and then hide and by the night as it retreats and the dawn when it breathes that this is the word brought by a noble messenger. He is endued with great power and held in honour before the Lord of the Throne. He is obeyed and is also very trustworthy. (15-21)

And this companion of yours is not one possessed, and he saw him in the clear horizon and he is not avaricious for the Unseen, and this is not the utterance of an accursed devil. (22-25)

Whither then are you going? This is nothing but a reminder to the people of the world. For he among you who intends to adopt the right path. And you will not intend unless the Lord of the Worlds intends. (26-29)

Explanation

إِذَا الشَّمْسُ كُوِّرَتْ¹ (١)

The word **تَكْوِيرٌ** means to “to fold something” or “to tie it up in the form of a bundle.” The expression **كَوَّرَ الْعِمَامَةَ عَلَى رَأْسِهِ** means “he wrapped the turban around his head”.

This is a portrayal of what will happen to the sun – which is the most prominent and majestic object of the skies and in fact of the whole universe: It will cease to be. Obviously, when this happens, the whole world which was lit up by it will become dark and murky. Although even now we experience the sun being veiled from our eyes every day, however, the nature of this concealment is absolutely different; this

1. When the sun is wrapped up.

situation only occurs when we are obstructed from receiving its light. At the advent of the Day of Judgement, on the other hand, the sun will be totally extinguished. Who can imagine the extent of darkness when the sun itself will become dark.

وَإِذَا النُّجُومُ انْكَدَرَتْ²(٢)

The word *انْكَدَرَتْ* means “to be bedimmed” and “to lose shine”. It is obvious that when the sun will cease to exist, all the bulbs and lanterns which rely on its light will automatically lose their luster.

وَإِذَا الْجِبَالُ سُيِّرَتْ³(٣)

After the skies, the fate of the most majestic and grand object of the earth – the mountains – is depicted. On the Day of Judgement, these mountains which are deeply set on this earth and which are thought of as eternal and enduring and immovable⁴ will be set in motion. At other places in the Qur’ān, more details are given in this regard: they will fly about like clouds.

وَإِذَا الْعِشَارُ عُطِّلَتْ⁵(٤)

The word *عِشَارٌ* is a plural of *عِشْرَاءَ*. It refers to a ten-month pregnant she-camel.

After a mention of the transient nature of great structures, here is a mention of the fleeting nature of a cherished thing. Such will be the upheaval on that day that no one will be able to think of others and the most favoured and cherished possessions will also have no importance in their eyes.

This verse takes into consideration the taste of the Arabs, who were its foremost addressees: camels were their most prized and valued possessions – most of all, she-camels which were ten-month pregnant and were about to give birth. The owners of such camels would take special care of them. Many of their future desires would depend on them. By citing these much treasured camels as example, the Qur’ān has reminded people who are infatuated by the love of this world of the

2. And the stars are bedimmed;

3. And the mountains are set in motion.

4. It should be kept in consideration that when the rejecters of the Day of Judgement would be warned of this day, they would mockingly inquire if this cataclysm would be able to uproot these mountains.

5. And camels ten-month pregnant wander untended.

Hereafter: such will be the horror of that day that the awe of its first phase will make people unconcerned of their very prized possessions: pregnant camels will be walking about unattended; so involved will be their masters in their own selves that they will be oblivious of their most cherished of possessions. At another place, this aspect is referred to in the following words: (يَوْمَ تَرَوْنَهَا تَذْهَلُ كُلُّ مُرْضِعَةٍ عَمَّا أَرْضَعَتْ (22:2)) (when that day comes, every suckling mother shall forget her infant, (22:2)). The only difference is that here the horror of that day is communicated through the insignificance of a prized possession and in 22:2 through the death of maternal love even though so potent is the force of this love that the greatest calamity of this world cannot subdue it.

وَإِذَا الْوُحُوشُ حُشِرَتْ (٥)⁶

The implication is that even wild beasts will become so concerned of their own fate that forgetting their natural enmities they will gather together in places wherever they expect to find refuge. Such will be the state of wild beasts what to speak of human beings. If a forest is engulfed with fire or if flood water spreads all over, the animals of the forest often herd together in fright on whatever hillock or mounds they can go to in order to confront a common calamity. So horror-stricken are they that goats, lions and wolves stand alongside one another but none of them will realize that its enemy or prey is right beside it. A similar situation will arise in its most dreadful form at the advent of the Day of Judgement. The very next verse shows that seas will cross their boundaries. This all-encompassing upheaval will make wild beasts unconcerned about their surroundings.

وَإِذَا الْبِحَارُ سُجِّرَتْ (٦)⁷

The word *تَسْجِيرٌ* refers to enflaming a stove by putting in more fuel in it. From here, it broadened in meaning and came to connote the tempestuousness of the seas. It is conventional to refer to seas which get out of control and exceed their boundaries and spread on the land by this word. Another word used to refer to this state of the seas is *تَفْجِيرٌ*. It is used in the succeeding *sūrah*, the counterpart of this *sūrah*: (وَإِذَا الْبِحَارُ فُجِّرَتْ (82:3)) (and when the seas burst forth, (82:3)).

The implication is that today these seas are confined in their shores but when the great upheaval of the Day of Judgement takes place, they will

6. And wild beasts come together.

7. And the seas burst forth.

burst out of their boundaries.

وَإِذَا النُّفُوسُ زُوِّجَتْ (٧)⁸

The scenario depicted earlier relates to the advent of the Day of Judgement. Now in this and the subsequent verses, the situation which will arise after its advent is discussed.

By grouping of the souls is meant the categorization of people on the basis of their faith and deeds. This refers to what is mentioned in Sūrah Wāqī'ah from verse seven: (٧:٥٦) وَكُنْتُمْ أَزْوَاجًا ثَلَاثَةً ([at that time], you shall be divided into three groups, (56:7)) to verse forty four. It is explained there that in this world both the righteous and the wrong-doers live together but this situation will not remain forever; a day will come when people will be grouped on the basis of their faith and deeds. On that day, people whose good deeds will be able to tilt the balance of justice will succeed and become worthy of an eternal kingdom and those who remained indifferent to this in their lives will have to face eternal humiliation and failure. After that, it is mentioned that people will be divided into three broad categories: the *sābiqūn* and *muqarrabūn*, the *aṣḥāb al-yamīn* and the *aṣḥāb al-shimāl* and an explanation of how the Almighty will deal with each of these three. Here, in the verse under discussion, all this is referred to in just a few words. The purpose of this mention is to inform people that this world is a place of trial and test. Here both good and evil are given the freedom to exist; however, after the advent of the Day of Judgement in the new world, the evil-doers will be thrown into Hell and those who pass this test will be blessed with eternal success.

وَإِذَا الْمَوْءُودَةُ سُئِلَتْ (٨) بِأَيِّ ذَنْبٍ قُتِلَتْ (٩)⁹

This is a mention of the justice which will take place on that Day of justice. As an example of this justice, the case of the buried alive infant girl is referred to. It is evident from this mention that on that day justice will be meted out to the blameless who were oppressed and tyrannized by their very custodians even though they were absolutely innocent.

The word مَوْءُودَةٌ means “an infant girl who is buried alive”.

In Arabia, in certain uncivilized tribes, a father would bury alive his infant girl. In most cases, the reason for this was the fear of poverty; however, in some cases, overblown honour was also the reason. Since it

8. And when souls are grouped together.

9. And the infant girl, who was buried alive is asked for what sin was she slain.

was the fathers, who had total authority over their children, who would perpetrate this heinous crime, hence there was no possibility of anyone coming to their rescue.

By mentioning the fact that justice will be done to the innocent, the Qur'ān has thrown light on the nature of the Court of Justice set up in the Hereafter: the innocent and the helpless shall be the foremost ones who shall be redressed. They are the ones who could not even plead for mercy in this world before anyone on the oppression they had to suffer from. They will be the first to be called and asked of the sin for which they had been killed. In other words, these callous fathers are severely reprimanded; they are told that if innocent girls are not able to plead against them for this atrocious sin, then they should not think that in the Hereafter too no one will hear their pleadings. On that day, the Almighty Himself will be the claimant of their killing. He will ask these innocent about the crime for which they were murdered. Obviously, the purpose of this question could be that the case of innocent killings which could not be presented in any court of this world will be brought up by the Almighty Himself to His court. Later, He will give His verdict.

¹⁰وَإِذَا الصُّحُفُ تُشْرَتْ^(١٠)

The word *صُحُفٌ* refers to the record of deeds of people and laying them open means that each and every deed will be brought before them. A succeeding verse reads: (٤١:٨١) عَلِمَتْ نَفْسٌ مَّا أَحْضَرَتْ (then each soul will know what it has brought forward, (81:41)).

¹¹وَإِذَا السَّمَاءُ كُشِطَتْ^(١١)

The word *كُشِطَتْ* means to take off something from the top of a thing that is covering it. From here, it came to be used for stripping the hide of an animal. This word is a common Arabic word for stripping the hide of a camel. It is a common observation that after stripping the hide of a slaughtered animal, its meat appears red; in other words, here the implication is that the sky will look red. In Sūrah Rahmān, the words are: (٣٧:٥٥) فَكَأَنَّهُ وَرِدَّةٌ كَاللَّهَانِ (it reddens like a rose of stained leather, (55:37)). Here the next verse of this *sūrah* mentions that Hell will be set ablaze which very clearly shows that the redness of the skies will be because of the fact that Hell would be set afire.

10. And when the scrolls of deeds are laid open.

11. And the skies are stripped bare.

وَإِذَا الْجَحِيمُ سُعِّرَتْ¹² (١٢)

The word تَسْعِيرٌ means “to set ablaze” and “to enflame”. The implication is that though Hell has already been prepared for the sinners, yet when the time comes to cast them into it, it will be ignited further and when these sinners will be thrown into it, it will burn even more since they are the most relished fuel for it.

وَإِذَا الْجَنَّةُ أُزْلِفَتْ¹³ (١٣)

The word إِزْلَافٌ means “to bring something near”. Paradise shall be brought near the virtuous who have become worthy of it. It is evident from this that though Paradise too would be ready for the virtuous beforehand, it shall be seen by its worthy companions after people have been categorized on the basis of their deeds. In Sūrah Qāf, it is explained that “bringing near Paradise” does not mean that it will be brought near from a far-off place; it will not be far off; it will be at hand and in spite of being at hand it will be brought even nearer so that it can be presented before its companions to honour them. The words are: وَأُزْلِفَتِ الْجَنَّةُ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ (and Paradise shall be brought close to the righteous even though it would not be far from them, (50:31))

عَلِمَتْ نَفْسٌ مَّا أَحْضَرَتْ¹⁴ (١٤)

This is a combined sequel of all the “whens” (إِذَا) mentioned in the previous verses. The overall sense being that when all these circumstances will befall, then each soul will come to know what it has brought forward for its Lord. “Knowing” here obviously refers to knowing its fate. The implication is that let them make fun of the Day of Judgement today; they should however remember that that day will come accompanied by a great upheaval and on that day each soul will see what it had prepared for this day and what it did not do even though it should have done it. In the next *sūrah*, which is the counterpart of this *sūrah*, this aspect is elaborated upon in more detail. The words are: عَلِمَتْ نَفْسٌ مَّا قَدَّمَتْ وَأَخَّرَتْ (٨٢: ٥) (at that time, every soul will come to know what it has sent forward and what it has left behind, (82:5)).

فَلَا أُقْسِمُ بِالْخُنَّسِ (١٥) الْجَوَارِي الْكُنَّسِ (١٦) وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا عَسْعَسَ (١٧) وَالصُّبْحِ إِذَا

12. And when Hell is set ablaze.

13. And Paradise is brought near.

14. Then each soul will know what it has brought forward.

تَنفَسَ (١٨) إِنَّهُ لَقَوْلُ رَسُولٍ كَرِيمٍ (١٩)¹⁵

This is a refutation of the false notion which the disbelievers had invented about the Messenger of God and His Book. It was on the basis of this notion that they would try to mislead the commoners and would tell them to not get influenced and overawed by the Qur'ān by regarding it to be from God. When they saw that people were getting influenced by the call of the Prophet (sws) and by his warnings of the Hereafter, they got alarmed because this could make them lose their following. So they tried to hoodwink people by fabricating the notion that neither is this Qur'ān a revelation from God nor is Muḥammad (sws) a Messenger of God. They concocted the notion that like many other soothsayers of their society, he too was a soothsayer and just as these soothsayers are in contact with the jinn who inspire them with secrets of the unseen and unknown world, he too, God forbid, is in contact with some devil who inspires him with such thoughts. He gives these inspirations the name of divine revelation and claims that he is a messenger of God who has been sent to them so that people may obey him; if they do not do so, then they will be punished in this world and in the Hereafter they will have to face the grievous punishment of Hell.

The Qur'ān has refuted this propaganda at various instances. In particular, Sūrah Shu'arā and Sūrah Najm have refuted it in great detail and I have discussed various aspects of it in the explanation of these *sūrahs*. Here too this propaganda is refuted through a new angle. In order to grasp it, one should have a deep understanding of the system of soothsaying and fortune-telling that was prevalent in Arabia in those times.

This had its roots in two things:

Firstly, in their self-claimed astrology, they believed that stars per se could effect happenings. They reckoned some stars to bring good fortune and others bad fortune. Similarly, they had fabricated various superstitions related to their rising and setting, traversing and hiding, ascending and descending. On the basis of these superstitions they would try to fool the masses by making good and evil predictions and in this manner try to impose them with their knowledge of the future. For example, at times they would spread the rumour that because of the opposite rotation of a particular star a great danger is about to befall so that people should consult them to protect themselves from it. The unfortunate who would be deceived by them in this manner would be totally befooled.

15. Therefore, No! I swear by the stars which recede, move forward and then hide and by the night as it retreats and the dawn when it breathes that this is the word brought by a noble messenger.

Secondly, they claimed that they had contacts with the jinn from whom they could receive the news of the unknown and unseen world. I have already explained in the *tafsīr* of Sūrah Shu'arā' that when anyone would seek help from them regarding such matters, they would put up a show of meditation and then would present what they claimed to be divine revelation. The words presented would be in the form of flowery rhymed prose which would often be meaningless; however, they would attribute some wavered meanings to it and claim that this revelation was inspired to them by a jinn who was aware of the secrets of the unknown world.

The Qur'ān has severely criticized both these pillars of soothsaying at various places. It has presented the rising and setting of the sun and of the moon and the stars in such a manner that it becomes clear that none of them has any authority per se to influence events and happenings and that none of them is a sign of good or bad fortune; their rising and setting are in the hands of the Almighty. It is He who makes them appear on the horizon whenever He wants to and it is He who makes them disappear at His own will. Thus these heavenly bodies by their very existence show that they are subservient to the Almighty. They come and go at His bidding.

Readers may take a look at the gradual development of the preaching of Abraham mentioned in 6:75-84. It would suffice to explain in this regard the nature of Qur'ānic reasoning and its logical outcome.

Similarly, in order to uproot the second pillar of soothsaying, the Qur'ān has referred to shooting stars and explained that there is absolutely no chance for the jinn to have access to the world beyond. If they try to eavesdrop to hear information from this world, the Almighty has set up a whole system to fend them off. As per this system, the shooting stars are pelted from their turrets at these jinn. Though this subject is discussed at various places in the Qur'ān, it would be worthwhile to take a look at the relevant verses of Sūrah Najm and Sūrah Jinn in order to understand the oaths mentioned in these verses.

After this introduction, let us now deliberate on the words and the implied meanings of these oaths

It is explained at several instances in this *tafsīr* that such oaths are meant to substantiate a claim and it is also explained that the occurrence of the particle of negation *lā* before such oaths is not meant to negate these oaths; it is, in fact, meant to negate the claim of the addressees which is to be refuted by the oath itself.

The word *خَنَّسٌ* is the plural of *خَائِسٌ*. It refers to something which comes forward and then draws away, something which appears and then disappears, something which becomes evident and then hides. This word is used as an adjective for the stars and so common is this usage that at times one does not need to mention the stars, and a mere mention of this

adjective is enough to point to the noun it qualifies. Some lexicographers regard it to connote some specific stars; however, this view is baseless. The adjectives which are mentioned here apply equally to all types of stars whether they are stationery or moving and whether they refer to some specific stars as Saturn or Mercury or some similar ones.

The expression الْجَوَارِي الْكُنَّسِ refers to some more attributes of the stars. The fact that these attributes occur here without any particle of conjunction shows that they all refer to the same noun. It has been explained at various places in this *tafsīr* that when adjectives are mentioned in such a manner, they refer to the same noun.

The word جَوَارِي means “one that traverses” and the word كُنَّسِ is the plural of كَانَسَ. The expression كُنَّسَ الظُّبْيُ means: “the deer hid in its shelter” while كُنَّسَتِ النُّجُومُ means: “the stars traversed their orbits and then hid in their destinations”. The author of the famous Arabic lexicon, *Aqrab al-Mawārid*, has explained that this adjective is common to all types of stars.¹⁶

This oath sworn by the stars is to refute soothsaying and fortune-telling. I have already alluded to earlier that the knowledge boasted by the soothsayers about the unknown and unseen world was based on two things: one, the stars could per se influence events and two, on the baseless notion that there are certain abodes in the heavens in which the jinn are able to hear what is going to happen in future and then deliver this information to these soothsayers. By mentioning these characteristics of the stars, the Qur’ān has refuted both these unfounded views. The fact that they set after rising and disappear after appearing and are so punctual at these instances is a clear evidence to their subservience to some higher authority and to not have any powers per se of effecting events that happen on the earth. Obviously, this higher authority is the all-wise and all-powerful God and hence He is the real Lord and Sanctuary for all and it is He who influences such events in a positive or a negative manner.

In order to negate the second of these views, the Qur’ān has revealed a secret of this universe: it is not that there are abodes of eavesdropping in these stars where the devils sit and snoop around for news of the unknown as is claimed by these foolish people; as a matter of fact, there are turrets and observation posts in the heavens from where these devils are pelted when they try to nose around for such news.

These attributes of the stars are mentioned in the form of oaths and therefore in order to make the discourse very eloquent and effective, there is great brevity in them. However, there are clues within the words

16. Sa’īd al-Khūrī al-Shartūnī, *Aqrab al-Mawārid fī Fuṣaḥī al-‘Arabiyyah wa al-Shawārid*. 1st ed., vol. 4 (Tehrān: Dār al-uswah, 1416 AH), 594.

which are enough to guide a person who deliberates on them. For example, the attribute خُسَّ very clearly directs our attention to their rising and setting. The purpose of mentioning this attribute is to point to the fact that the foolish have only given importance to the rising of these heavenly bodies and have made them their deities whereas they should also have witnessed their setting which is a very clear evidence of their subservience to a superior being.

Similarly, in the expression الجَوَارِي الكُتَّس there is a subtle reference to the movement of stars as they chase away the devils. When the latter try to eavesdrop, they are struck by these stars; it is as if a burst of lightning emerges like an arrow and after reaching its destination hides back in its bow.

وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا عَسْعَسَ (١٧) وَالصُّبْحِ إِذَا تَنَفَّسَ (١٨) ¹⁷

This is another oath which bears witness from another angle to the premise mentioned.

The word عَسْعَسَ has two meanings: “to turn dark” as well “to withdraw and to pass away”. Although the verse can be interpreted in the light of both these meanings, I have given preference to the second of these meanings. The reason is that this same oath is mentioned in this same context with slight change of words in the verses of Sūrah Muddaththir thus:

وَالصُّبْحِ إِذَا أَسْفَرَ وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا أَدْبَرَ (٧٤: ٣٣-٣٤)

And the night bears witness when it turned its back and the morning when it is unveiled. (74:33-34)

In these verses also, the certainty of the Qur’ān’s warnings about the Hereafter is substantiated and in the verses under discussion as well, as will be shown, it is this premise which has been substantiated.

The word تَنَفَّسَ connotes the appearance of dawn but there is a special subtlety in this usage which is not hidden from the connoisseurs of the language. This word gives the impression that the dawn is burdened with the weight of the night in such a manner as if it is gasping for breath and it is the Almighty which lifts this heavy quilt from it and it is able to breathe and lift its head.

17. By the night as it retreats and the dawn when it breathes.

إِنَّهُ لَقَوْلُ رَسُولٍ كَرِيمٍ (١٩)¹⁸

This verse is the *muqṣam* 'alayh or the premise which is substantiated by the two aforementioned oaths. The word "messenger" here refers to Gabriel. The attributes which are subsequently mentioned and which shall be explained show that these attributes can only be for Gabriel.

What is stated in this verse is repeated in a negative manner in verse twenty five ahead: وَمَا هُوَ بِقَوْلِ شَيْطَانٍ رَجِيمٍ (and this is not the utterance of an accursed devil). From this repetition also becomes evident the real stress of the word كَرِيمٍ. The implication is that unfortunate are the people who regard this Qur'ān to be a claptrap of the soothsayers and call the Prophet of God a soothsayer. Whatever soothsayers present is from the devils and there is no truth in it. They claim to have knowledge of the world beyond; however, their devils are so accursed in the eyes of God that they are pelted with shooting stars if they try to eavesdrop what to speak of having access to that world. On the contrary, the Book which is being recited to them has been brought by a Messenger of God who commands great respect in God's presence and is very honourable and favoured.

ذِي قُوَّةٍ عِنْدَ ذِي الْعَرْشِ مَكِينٍ (٢٠) مُطَاعٍ ثَمَّ أَمِينٍ (٢١)¹⁹

More attributes of Gabriel are mentioned here so that it becomes evident that the Qur'ān has been revealed in a very safe, secure and pure manner and it also becomes evident in contrast the means through which the soothsayers receive the knowledge they boast. The Almighty has blessed him with such strong and sound characteristics that devilish forces cannot overawe, overpower or influence him. They cannot cause any hindrance in the duties assigned to him or pinch something from him or deceive him. He implements the directives of the Almighty with full diligence and authority because he is held high and favoured in the presence of God. He has direct access to the Almighty. No one else can come between him and God. In Sūrah Najm, this quality of Gabriel is mentioned by the words شَدِيدُ الْقُوَى (strong) and ذُو مِرَّةٍ (powerful) and I have explained them there.

The word مُطَاعٍ refers to the fact that the spirits and angels which are subservient to Gabriel obey him without questioning him; they dare not deviate from his directives in the slightest manner or take a step without his permission or make any changes in his directives or connive with the devils.

18. That this is the word brought by a noble messenger.

19. He is endued with great power and held in honour before the Lord of the Throne. He is obeyed and is also very trustworthy.

A study of classical Arabic literature shows that there is a great difference between the usage of *ثُمَّ* and *ثُمَّ*. The word *ثُمَّ* is used for specifically pointing towards something and is also used before an attribute to emphasize it. For example in (٦٤:٢٦) وَأَرْزَلْنَاهُمْ الْآخِرِينَ if the translation of this verse is done giving due consideration to *ثُمَّ* then it should be: “At that very place, We also brought others.” The implication being that the very path on which the Almighty saved the Israelites, He brought the Pharaoh and his people to that very path in order to drown them.

This word also occurs in Sūrah Dahr thus: وَإِذَا رَأَيْتَ ثَمَّ رَأَيْتَ نَعِيمًا وَمُلْكًا كَبِيرًا (٢٠:٧٦). A faithful translation of this verse would read: “Wherever you look, you will see a great favour and a great kingdom.” Similarly, when this word occurs before an attribute, it is meant to highlight the grandeur and importance of that attribute. Here it has come right before the attribute “trustworthy” and hence the purpose is to underscore this attribute of Gabriel. In other words, besides the qualities mentioned in these verses, the attribute of trustworthiness is meant to be specifically emphasized.

The reason that this attribute is mentioned with such stress is that it is this attribute which ensures that whatever Gabriel brings from God to the Prophet (sws) is absolutely free of any alteration and is presented in its original form. On the other hand, the knowledge of the soothsayers is based on the jinn which are thieves and muggers. In the first place, they are not able to reach the world beyond and if they are able to pinch something it is an absolute falsity to which they add more falsity and then inspire it to their soothsayers. Moreover, these soothsayers are also great liars. They too exaggerate and inflate trivialities. In other words, what is implied by these verses is that this stagnated water from the soothsayers has no relation to the pure fountain from which the messengers of God receive water.

²⁰ وَمَا صَاحِبُكُمْ بِمَجْنُونٍ (٢٢)

After explaining the purity of the fountain from which the Prophet (sws) receives knowledge, here in this verse the leaders of the Quraysh are addressed that if their companion, Muḥammad (sws), claims that the Almighty has deputed him to warn them and whatever he is reciting out to them is the message of God which His most favoured angel has brought down to him, then they should not regard this message to be something inspired by madness or insanity; on the contrary, it is a truth from God.

Here the word *صَاحِبُكُمْ* (your companion) carries great eloquence. The implication is that he is not an unknown person to them; he was born and

20. And this companion of yours is not one possessed.

brought up among them and till now has lived each and every phase of his life among them; each one of them is a witness to his decency, sobriety, solemnity, chastity, veracity and trustworthiness. If his urging and counsel is weighing down heavily upon them, they should dispassionately reflect on what he is saying keeping in view his hitherto character rather than regarding him to be a madman or a soothsayer.

وَلَقَدْ رَآهُ بِالْأُفُقِ الْمُبِينِ (٢٣)²¹

The verse highlights the fact that if the Prophet (sws) claims that he has seen the angel who brings the revelations to him, then this is not a false claim or a delusion; it is an absolutely true claim. He, in fact, has seen the angel in the clear and open horizon. The words *الْأُفُقِ الْمُبِينِ* refer to the expansive space which is before one's eyes and which one can observe clearly with the naked eye. In Sūrah Najm, the words *الْأُفُقِ الْأَعْلَى* (the uppermost horizon) has been used for it:

عَلَّمَهُ شَدِيدُ الْقُوَى ذُو مِرَّةٍ فَاسْتَوَى وَهُوَ بِالْأُفُقِ الْأَعْلَى ثُمَّ دَنَا فَتَدَلَّى فَكَانَ قَابَ قَوْسَيْنِ أَوْ أَدْنَى فَأَوْحَى إِلَى عَبْدِهِ مَا أَوْحَى مَا كَذَبَ الْفُؤَادُ مَا رَأَى أَفَتُمَارُونَهُ عَلَى مَا يَرَى (٥٣: ٥-١٢)

He is taught by one who is strong and powerful. He stood straight even though he was on the uppermost horizon; then drew near and came down within two bows' length or even closer. Then God revealed to His servant that which He revealed. His own heart did not deny his vision. So do you people fight with him on what he sees? (53:5-12)

The reader is advised to read the *tafsīr* of these verses. Referred in them are the experiences the Prophet (sws) went through when divine revelation began. When he mentioned these experiences before his people they got after him and made up various tales to refute him. Some regarded these experiences to be Satanic inspirations and others hallucinations. It is such people who are addressed in this verse and told that if the Prophet (sws) claims to have met the angel, then this is neither a hallucination nor an illusion; it is an indubitable observation seen in the open horizon.

وَمَا هُوَ عَلَى الْغَيْبِ بِضَنِينٍ (٢٤)²²

The implication of this verse is that like the soothsayers, the Prophet

21. And he saw him in the clear horizon.

22. And he is not avaricious for the Unseen

(sws) of God has no greed for the unseen: he does not regard whatever notion that springs in his heart to be the truth and thereby claim to have access to the unseen. Like the soothsayers, he is not a source of misleading people. The revelation he presents before the disbelievers comes to him through an involuntary process. Their soothsayers indulge in all sorts of ploys to gain access to the world beyond and it is on such activities that their business flourishes and if they are not able to lay hands on the truth, they sell falsehood; on the other hand, these disbelievers know well that their companion has never gone after such things. Whatever he is presenting to them is not a display of fortune-telling or an excuse to extort money; on the contrary, his whole effort is involuntary and unintentional.

Generally, the word صَنِينٌ has been translated as “stingy”; however, I have translated it as “avaricious”. As both stinginess and avarice always co-exist, the difference in this translation is very slight. My preference stems from the fact that when the word صَنَّ means “stinginess” it comes with the preposition ب. Here the preposition عَلَى is used which indicates that it encompasses the meaning of avarice.

23 وَمَا هُوَ بِقَوْلِ شَيْطَانٍ رَجِيمٍ (٢٥)

What is stated in verse nineteen as: إِنَّهُ لَقَوْلُ رَسُولٍ كَرِيمٍ (that this is the word brought by a noble messenger) is emphasized here negatively: it is not the utterance of an accursed devil which is revealed to their soothsayers.

The word رَجِيمٍ is used in contrast to كَرِيمٍ. The implication is that the angel who comes to Muḥammad (sws) is a noble angel and the devils who come to their soothsayers are accursed. The word رَجِيمٍ means “he who is stoned.” I have already indicated earlier that devils who try to eavesdrop to gain knowledge from the world beyond are pelted with stones through shooting stars; for this reason, these devils are mentioned with their permanent attribute of رَجِيمٍ.

24 فَأَيْنَ تَذْهَبُونَ (٢٦)

This is an expression of amazement at the stubbornness and poor choice of the disbelievers. What comparison does as lofty a discourse as the Qur’ān have with the nonsensical concoctions of the soothsayers. Where is their crazy obduracy leading them to that they are not able to distinguish a pearl from a pebble.

23. And this is not the utterance of an accursed devil.

24. Whither then are you going?

إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ لِلْعَالَمِينَ (٢٧) لِمَنْ شَاءَ مِنْكُمْ أَنْ يَسْتَقِيمَ (٢٨)²⁵

Here, at the end of the *sūrah*, these verses sound a very effective warning: the Qur'ān is the forewarner to a day which is bound to come and from which no one can escape. If the disbelievers follow the path outlined by the Qur'ān, they will only themselves stand to gain and it will be no favour of theirs to others. They should also remember the fact that to accept or reject it is their responsibility and not that of God and His Prophet (sws) to force it upon them; therefore, he who wants to adopt the straight path should do so; otherwise, he should get prepared to face the consequences in the Hereafter.

وَمَا تَشَاءُونَ إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْعَالَمِينَ (٢٩)²⁶

Mentioned in this verse is the divine law of guidance: The Almighty produces the will to seek guidance only in those who want to receive guidance and use their abilities for this purpose. He lets people wander in darkness who spend their lives turning blind and deaf to guidance. I have explained this law at various places in this *tafsīr*. In the last verses of Sūrah Muddaththir too this law has been explained. Those who want to study it in detail may look it up.

With the grace of God, I come to the end of this *sūrah's tafsīr*. فالحمد لله
(praise and gratitude be to God for His favour)

Rahmānābād,

17th July, 1979 AD

21st Shā'bān, 1399 AH

25. This is nothing but a reminder to the people of the world. For he among you who intends to adopt the right path.

26. And you will not intend unless the Lord of the worlds intends.

Sūrah Infiṭār

Central Theme and Relationship with the Preceding Sūrah

This *sūrah* is the counterpart of Sūrah Takwīr, the previous *sūrah*. There exists great similarity between the intrinsic and extrinsic form, style and meanings of both *sūrahs*. Just as the previous *sūrah* begins with a portrayal of the great cataclysm which will take place in the heavens and the earth at the advent of the Day of Judgement, this *sūrah* also begins in a similar fashion. The real objective of each of these *sūrahs* is also mentioned in very similar words. This is stated in the previous *sūrah* by the words: (٨١:١٤) عَلِمَتْ نَفْسٌ مَّا أُخْضَرَتْ (then each soul will know what it has brought forward, (81:14)), while it is stated in this *sūrah* by the words: (٨٢:٥) عَلِمَتْ نَفْسٌ مَّا قَدَّمَتْ وَأَخَّرَتْ (at that time every soul will come to know what it has sent forward and what it has left behind, (82:5)). Scholars of the past have also commented that if anyone wants to see the picture of the upheaval that will take place at the advent of the Day of Judgement, he should read these two *sūrahs*. The real addressees of both *sūrahs* are the rich and arrogant among the Quraysh who were turning a deaf ear to the warnings of the Qur'ān just because they thought that no one would be able to break into their castles and edifices.

However, the basis of reasoning in both *sūrahs* is different. In the previous *sūrah*, the basis of reasoning is the authenticity and genuineness of the Qur'ān: it is explained that its source, its means of revelation and its bearer are all pure and upright. People who are trying to relate it to the speculations of the soothsayers and astrologers are ones who are unable to differentiate the radiant dawn from the murky night. In this *sūrah*, on the other hand, the basis of reasoning is the attributes of creativity, power, wisdom, justice and mercy of the Almighty. In other words, the signs of God's power and mercy evident in man's being entail that one day He set up a day of reward and punishment in which the righteous are rewarded and the rebellious are punished. Such a day is bound to come and it is not difficult at all for the Almighty to bring about such a day. When creating the first time was not difficult for Him, how can creating again be difficult for Him. If, in this world, He is ignoring the crimes of criminals, then this does not mean that He is unconcerned about vice and virtue. It is only because of His munificence that He gives respite to His servants so that they may reform themselves if they want to; in case they do not reform

themselves, they will be left with no excuse for their denial and on the Day of Judgement they will have no justification for what they did in this world. This delay from God should not mislead people to think that their words or deeds are hidden from Him. He has deputed His angels on every person who are noting down each and everything.

Analysis of the Sūrah

Following is the sequence of the discourse adopted:

Verses (1-5): A terse portrayal of what will happen to the heavens and its stars, the earth and its graves at the advent of the Day of Judgement and a warning to people that on day each and every secret will be revealed.

Verses (6-8): With reference to the grandeur of divine attributes of power, wisdom, mercy and justice found in the formation of a human being a reminder is sounded that no one should think that the Day of Judgement is beyond the power of God and that no one should remain in the misconception that he will be left unaccountable. The thorough and perfect way in which God has created human beings shows that their existence is not without a purpose and meaning.

Verses (9-12): People should not remain in the misconception that God is unaware of all their words and deeds so that He needs a day to have count of them. He has deputed angels on each person who record all their words and deeds with full caution and faithfulness.

Verses (13-16): On the Day of Judgement, the righteous and the faithful will enter the gardens of blessings and the wrong-doers shall be cast into Hell. Once they enter it, they will never be able to get out from it.

Verse (17-19): A mention of the impartial justice which will be delivered on the Day of Judgement: on that Day, all authority and power will rest with God. No person will be able to interfere in someone else's affairs.

Text and Translation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

إِذَا السَّمَاءُ انْفَطَرَتْ (١) وَإِذَا الْكَوَاكِبُ انْتَثَرَتْ (٢) وَإِذَا الْبِحَارُ فُجِّرَتْ (٣) وَإِذَا الْقُبُورُ
بُعْثِرَتْ (٤) عَلِمْتَ نَفْسٌ مَا قَدَّمَتْ وَأَخَّرَتْ (٥) يَا أَيُّهَا الْإِنْسَانُ مَا غَرَّكَ بِرَبِّكَ الْكَرِيمِ
(٦) الَّذِي خَلَقَكَ فَسَوَّاكَ فَعَدَلَكَ (٧) فِي أَيِّ صُورَةٍ مَا شَاءَ رَكَّبَكَ (٨) كَلَّا بَلْ تُكَذِّبُونَ
بِالدِّينِ (٩) وَإِنَّ عَلَيْكُمْ لَحَافِظِينَ (١٠) كِرَامًا كَاتِبِينَ (١١) يَعْلَمُونَ مَا تَفْعَلُونَ (١٢) إِنَّ
الْأَبْرَارَ لَفِي نَعِيمٍ (١٣) وَإِنَّ الْفُجَّارَ لَفِي جَحِيمٍ (١٤) يَصْلَوْنَهَا يَوْمَ الدِّينِ (١٥) وَمَا هُمْ عَنْهَا

بِعَائِبِينَ (١٦) وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا يَوْمَ الدِّينِ (١٧) ثُمَّ مَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا يَوْمَ الدِّينِ (١٨) يَوْمَ لَا تَمْلِكُ
نَفْسٌ لِنَفْسٍ شَيْئًا وَالْأَمْرُ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلَّهِ (١٩)

In the name of Allah, the most Gracious, the ever Merciful.

When the sky is rent asunder, and when the stars are scattered, and when the seas burst forth, and when the graves are opened, at that time every soul will come to know what it has sent forward and what it has left behind. (1-5)

O man! What is it that has deceived you about your Beneficent Lord, Who made your sketch, then perfected and gave you due proportion. He put you together in whatever shape He pleased. (6-8)

Certainly not! You, in fact, deny reward and punishment, whereas appointed over you are guardians, noble scribes. They know what you do. (9-12)

Indeed, the righteous shall dwell in bliss and the wretched ones shall be in Hell; they will enter it on the Day of Judgement, and then will never leave it. (13-16)

And what have you understood what the Day of Judgement is? Speak up: What have you understood what the Day of Judgement is? On that Day, no soul will be able to do anything for another. The matter, on that Day, will entirely be in the hands of Allah. (17-19)

Explanation

إِذَا السَّمَاءُ انْفَطَرَتْ (١)¹

The verbal noun *إِنْفِطَار* means “to be torn apart” and “to be rent asunder”. It is mentioned in the Qur’ān at a number of places that the sky will be rent asunder at the advent of the Day of Judgement. In Sūrah Inshiqāq, the very first verse reads thus: إِذَا السَّمَاءُ انشَقَّتْ (٨٤:١) (when the sky is rent asunder). In the thirty seventh verse of Sūrah Raḥmān also, the word *إِنْشِقَاق* is used and *إِنْفِطَار* and *إِنْشِقَاق* are synonyms. The next world will come into existence under a new set of physical laws and the current world shall be totally destroyed. The exact shape and form of this destruction cannot be imagined; however, a reminder of this day is sounded so that the rich and the arrogant who are today living without any fear of this day by relying on the strength of their castles and buildings are cautioned and prodded; they are warned that such a great upheaval will take place on that day that the roof of this whole world will be shattered and cavities will appear all over it what to speak of man-

1. When the sky is rent asunder.

made structures. This roof which appears strong, flawless and resilient to them will be ruptured on that day.

Here we may not confuse ourselves by trying to ascertain whether this sky is a vacuum or solid matter; we should only have full belief in the fact that what is appearing as a robust and faultless roof today will be ripped apart and fissures will appear all over it when that great upheaval will take place.

وَإِذَا الْكَوَاكِبُ انْتَثَرَتْ²(٢)

The word *إِنْتَثَرَتْ* means “to be scattered” and “to be dispersed”. Today the stars appear to be woven in an invisible string and appear to be suspended like lamps from the roof of the heavens; however, on that day, this string will be heaved away and the stars will fall and become scattered all over. In the previous *sūrah*, it is mentioned that stars will lose their light because once the sun is destroyed their relationship with the solar system will end; in this *sūrah*, a mention of their dispersal is made because the very roof from which they are suspended for its decoration will be no more.

وَإِذَا الْبِحَارُ فُجِّرَتْ³(٣) وَإِذَا الْقُبُورُ بُعْثِرَتْ³(٤)

After a mention of the sky and its stars, the state of the two things which belong to the earth – the seas and the graves – is now stated in these verses.

The meaning conveyed by the word *فُجِّرَتْ* is the same as the one conveyed by *سُجِّرَتْ*, which occurs in the previous *sūrah*. The only difference between these words is that from the first is evident the unrestrained nature of the seas and from the second is evident their tumultuous nature. As per the first word, the seas at the advent of the Day of Judgement will cross their current limits and spread over the crest and fall of the land. I have already explained this aspect under verse six of *Sūrah Dahr*.

The expression *بُعْثَرَ الشَّيْءِ* means “to scatter and disperse something”, “to tear open something”, “to open something and take out whatever is in it”. Only graves are mentioned in this verse because their mention and the mention of the fact that people would be exhumed from them is the most effective to warn people. However, it is evident from other verses of the Qur’ān that the earth will throw overboard all its burdens. In *Sūrah*

2. And when the stars are scattered.

3. And when the seas burst forth, and when the graves are opened.

Zilzāl, the words are: (99:2) وَأَخْرَجَتِ الْأَرْضُ أَثْقَالَهَا (and the earth casts out all its burdens, (99:2)), while in Sūrah Inshiqāq, the words are: وَإِذَا الْأَرْضُ مُدَّتْ وَأَلْقَتْ مَا فِيهَا وَتَخَلَّتْ (and when the earth is stretched out and casts out all things within her, (84:3-4)).

عَلِمْتَ نَفْسٌ مَا قَدَّمَتْ وَأَخَّرَتْ⁴(5)

This is a mention of the real thing that will come before each individual. The implication is that people who today are making fun of the Prophet (sws) should not vainly reckon that this situation will continue forever; they should contemplate their fate keeping in view the great upheaval of that day that they will have to encounter. None, whether the small or the big, will be able to seek refuge from it.

If the expression مَا قَدَّمَتْ وَأَخَّرَتْ is interpreted keeping in view the arrogant which are the foremost addressees of the *sūrah*, it would mean that they will see the fate of the misdeeds they were not able to do against the Almighty and His Prophet (sws) but fully intended to do, and will also taste the yearning of good deeds which they had ignored. In Sūrah Jumu‘ah, it is stated about the Jews: وَلَا يَتَمَنَّوْنَهُ أَبَدًا بِمَا قَدَّمَتْ أَيْدِيهِمْ (and they will never wish for death because of the deeds they are doing, (62:7)). The implication is that they are fully aware of the deeds they have sent forward and they do not have the courage to face the Almighty. Similarly, it is mentioned at a number of places in the Qur‘ān that on the Day of Judgement the disbelievers will express their yearning to have done something for the Hereafter. In Sūrah Fajr, the words are: يَقُولُ يَا لَيْتَنِي قَدَّمْتُ لِحَيَاتِي (he will say: “would that I had done something in this world for the world to come,” (89:24)). Similarly, in Sūrah Mu‘minūn, the words used are: حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءَ أَحَدَهُمُ الْمَوْتُ قَالَ رَبِّ ارْجِعُونِ (when death comes to one of them, he will say: “Lord! Send me back so that I may earn some virtue from the wealth I have left behind,” (23:99-100)).

In the light of these parallel verses of the Qur‘ān, the correct connotation of the words “know what he has sent forward and what he has left behind” can be ascertained. However, some people have interpreted them to mean: (whatever good or evil he did or could not do) and (what he sent forth from his wealth to the next world and what he left behind from it for his heirs). Although, these interpretations can be understood to be implied from the general connotation of the verse, I, in the light of its context and placement, would

4. At that time every soul will come to know what it has sent forward and what it has left behind.

give preference to the interpretation I have made.

يَا أَيُّهَا الْإِنْسَانُ مَا غَرَّكَ بِرَبِّكَ الْكَرِيمِ (٦)⁵

Although the address in this verse is general, however it is actually directed at the disbelievers who have been warned in this *sūrah*. Consequently, in a forthcoming verse they are directly addressed in the words: *كَلَّا بَلْ تُكَذِّبُونَ بِالَّذِينَ* (certainly not! you, in fact, deny reward and punishment). The eloquence and expressiveness found in addressing a specific addressee by general words has been indicated at a number of places in this *tafsīr*.

The interrogative style of the verse is meant to express wonder. The Almighty does not seize them immediately on their misdeeds and continues to give them respite. It is implied that if it is this benevolence of their Lord which has led them to become fearless of the Day of Judgement, then they have gravely misconceived this benevolence. They should have actually valued this munificence and expressed gratitude to God and in this way made themselves entitled to further favours from Him; instead, they became stubborn and started to make fun of His warnings and reckoned that their affluence is their birth-right and that the Day of Judgement of which their prophet is warning them is a delusion.

الَّذِي خَلَقَكَ فَسَوَّاكَ فَعَدَلَكَ (٧) فِي أَيِّ صُورَةٍ مَا شَاءَ رَكَّبَكَ (٨)⁶

Here the Almighty has referred to some of His attributes which are found in the very creation of man and which bear evidence to a certain premise: the Almighty Who has shown such prowess of power, creativity, thoroughness and wisdom in creating man cannot be regarded to have done something without a purpose or that He will let man go unaccountable; on the contrary, He will certainly bring about a day in which He will call man to His presence and hold him accountable and then will bless the obedient with eternal favours and throw the arrogant sinners into Hell. If this is not so, then this would render meaningless the tremendous diligence and thoroughness He has shown in creating man and this would also negate His power and wisdom evident in all His works.

The word *خَلَقَ* means “to make a sketch of something”, “to create something” and *سَوَّى* means “to perfect something”. In other words, the verse under discussion alludes to the initial as well as the final stages of the creation of man. The word *عَدَلَكَ* refers to the fact that the Almighty

5. O man! What is it that has deceived you about your Beneficent Lord.

6. Who made your sketch, then perfected and gave you due proportion. He put you together in whatever shape He pleased.

has given man due proportion.

The purpose of mentioning these stages is to direct our attention to God's diligence and thoroughness in creating man, as is referred to above. This diligence bears witness to the fact that man is not a toy which God has created for His temporary amusement and will dismantle it whenever He likes. The more a person is thorough in making something, the more purpose it is supposed to have, and on this very basis occupies a certain importance in this world. Human beings are not like moths which are born in the rainy season. They are a reflection of the brilliant creativity of God. Thus it is essential that after passing through various tests they reach the fate ordained for them and if they do not show the courage to do so then it is essential that they be punished for this cowardice.

The word عَدَلَكَ refers to the balance and proportion mentioned in the verse: (لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي أَحْسَنِ تَقْوِيمٍ (٩٥: ٤)) (We have created man in the finest of moulds, (95:4)). Man with regard to his external appearance and spiritual abilities occupies the exact middle position among all other creations of God; for this reason, he is worthy of being made the vicegerent of God on earth by the Almighty and given the status of the "middle community" (*ummat-i wasat*) and if he befittingly fulfils the responsibility of this vicegerency, he be granted the eternal kingdom of heaven.

The verse فِي أَيِّ صُورَةٍ مَا شَاءَ رَكَّبَكَ (He put you together in whatever shape He pleased) refers to the fact that man should observe the creativity, diligence and thoroughness of the Almighty as a result of which each person was made in a different mould with different looks; He did not encounter the slightest of difficulty in this; it is impossible to find two people from the millions living who have the same looks and features.

The implication is that the God whose power and blessing are such will definitely bring forth a day in which He distinguishes the righteous from the wrong-doers and for this He will raise up mankind once again without the slightest of difficulty.

كَلَّا بَلْ تُكَذِّبُونَ بِالَّذِينَ⁷ (٩)

The word كَلَّا (certainly not!) is meant to refute the doubts and objections which the disbelievers would raise against the Day of Judgement. These doubts and objections have been negated in the earlier verses through the attributes of God found in the creation of man. After presenting them, these argument-mongers are chided and told that all their doubts and objections are baseless; they are artificial and in reality they do not want to

7. Certainly not! You, in fact, deny reward and punishment.

believe in reward and punishment; for this reason, they are raising such baseless doubts as how is it possible for people to be recreated after death. The fact of the matter is that if reward and punishment are a requisite of intellect, human nature, justice as well as of the attributes of God's mercy and wisdom, how is it difficult for God to recreate man.

Here, it should be kept in mind that at times a person wants to refute something but since he does not find any possibility for this, he starts raising irrelevant questions so that the door to doubt and distrust is opened. The disbelievers of the Quraysh found themselves in such a situation. They knew that denying reward and punishment would be denying something obvious; however, they did not want to accept and acknowledge it too. For this reason, they would invent baseless doubts and try to give the false impression that they had certain reasons on the basis of which they were rejecting the warnings of the Qur'ān.

وَإِنَّ عَلَيْكُمْ لَحَافِظِينَ (١٠) كِرَامًا كَاتِبِينَ (١١) يَعْلَمُونَ مَا تَفْعَلُونَ (١٢)⁸

These verses also relate to the reprimand found in the previous verse and as well as to the baseless objection the disbelievers would raise to deny accountability in the Hereafter.

They are told that they must not remain in the misconception that no one can be aware of all their open and hidden deeds in order to hold them accountable one day for them; the Almighty has appointed guardians on each and every person who are noting each and every word and deed that emanates from them; these honourable guardians listen to and know whatever people say and do.

The attribute كِرَام (noble) for the angels is meant to remind us that on whatever duty they are deputed they carry it out with full diligence, responsibility and impartiality. They are not negligent in their duty nor irresponsible and careless in any manner; they do not procrastinate nor show feebleness; they also cannot be cajoled and pressurized and lured into partiality.

In the words يَعْلَمُونَ مَا تَفْعَلُونَ (they know what you do) only deeds are referred to; however, in Sūrah Qāf it is said: مَا يَلْفِظُ مِنْ قَوْلٍ إِلَّا لَدَيْهِ رَقِيبٌ عَتِيدٌ (١٨:٥٠) (each word he utters shall be noted down by a vigilant guardian, (50:18)). It is further elaborated in Sūrah Qāf that these angels are two in number and guard a person from his right and from his left. Certain narratives also speak of their division in labour: one of them writes the virtues of a person and the other his vices.

8. Whereas appointed over you are guardians, noble scribes. They know what you do.

إِنَّ الْأَبْرَارَ لَفِي نَعِيمٍ (١٣) وَإِنَّ الْفُجَّارَ لَفِي جَحِيمٍ (١٤)⁹

Stated in these verses is the consequence of the thoroughness and diligence of the Almighty mentioned earlier: this diligence shows that the Almighty will not deal with the righteous and the wrongdoers in the same manner; He will bless the former with Paradise and throw the latter into Hell. People who think that there is only this worldly life and after this there is no life or death are foolish; equally naïve are those who dream that if ever there is going to be life after death they will be able to attain even more luxuries of life at that time with the help of the intercession of their deities. The Creator of this world is not insensitive to vice and virtue, and hence will not deal with the pious and the impious in the same manner; He will necessarily distinguish between the two and will reward or punish each according to his deeds; if this does not happen, it will mean that the righteous and the wrongdoers are alike in His sight and that His world is a place in which justice and fairness have no place.

يَصْلَوْنَهَا يَوْمَ الدِّينِ (١٥) وَمَا هُمْ عَنْهَا بِغَائِبِينَ (١٦)¹⁰

The implication is that instead of living in dreams, people should face the reality: on the day of Judgement, all the wretched will be in Hell and then they will never be able to leave it. The verse وَمَا هُمْ عَنْهَا بِغَائِبِينَ (and they will never be able to disappear from it) is of the same meaning as that of the verse خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا أَبَدًا (they will remain in it forever) which occurs at many places in the Qur'ān. The implication is that if someone thinks that in case he does not like the place he will find a way out to escape from it, then he should do away with this conjecture. People will never be able to come out of it once they enter it.

وَمَا أَذْرَاكَ مَا يَوْمُ الدِّينِ (١٧) ثُمَّ مَا أَذْرَاكَ مَا يَوْمُ الدِّينِ (١٨)¹¹

This question is meant to explain the grandeur and majesty of the Day of Judgement and its repetition actually increases its awe. The singular address is not for the Prophet (sws). It is for the same people as were addressed in an earlier verse مَا غَرَّكَ بِرَبِّكَ الْكَرِيمِ (what is it that has deceived you about your Beneficent Lord) and those subsequent to it. I have already

9. Indeed, the righteous shall dwell in bliss and the wretched ones shall be in Hell.

10. They will enter it on the Day of Judgement, and then will never leave it.

11. And what have you understood what the Day of Judgement is? Speak up: What have you understood what the Day of Judgement is?

explained at many places in this *tafsīr* the eloquence found in addressing plural entities in the singular.

يَوْمَ لَا تَمْلِكُ نَفْسٌ لِنَفْسٍ شَيْئًا وَالْأَمْرُ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلَّهِ (١٩)¹²

Since the question raised in the previous verse was not meant to elicit an answer but to only portray the dread and horror of that day, so without waiting for any response from the addressees, this final verse itself asserts the answer: on that day, no one would be of any benefit to any other; all deities which were regarded to be partners of God and intercessors to Him and which were worshipped in the hope that they would be able to save people from the grasp of God would have no power on that day.

With the grace of God, I now come to the end of this *sūrah's tafsīr*.
 فالحمد لله على إحسانه (gratitude be to God for His favours)

Raḥmānābād,

29th July 1979 AD

4th Ramaḍān al-Mubārak, 1399 AH

12. On that Day, no soul will be able to do anything for another. The matter, on that Day, will entirely be in the hands of Allah.

Sūrah Muṭaffifīn

Central Theme and Relationship with the Preceding Sūrah

This *sūrah* is a supplement to Sūrah Infiṭār, the previous *sūrah*. Both have basically the same central theme. This *sūrah* is an elaboration of the division of the righteous and the defiant mentioned at the end of the previous *sūrah*. The only difference between the two *sūrahs* is the basis of reasoning. In the previous *sūrah*, the attributes of God that are prominent in man's physical being are adduced from. In this *sūrah*, the nature with which the Almighty has blessed a person is adduced from.

One can explain the basis of reasoning presented in this *sūrah* by saying that by his very nature man likes justice and what is good and dislikes injustice and what is evil. This difference between his likes and dislikes bears evidence that the Creator of this nature differentiates between justice and injustice or in other words between the just and the unjust. He cannot regard the two to be alike. If this was so, why would He have given man the ability to distinguish between good and evil.

The question now arises that if by nature a person likes good, then why does he perpetrate evil? The answer to this question is that he does not do evil because he likes it by nature; it is what is good that he likes by nature and it is just by being overwhelmed by other motives and inclinations that he commits evil while going against his nature. Had he by nature liked injustice and evil, he should have remained happy even when some other person was unjust to him; however, everyone can witness that this is not so: the very person who is dishonest in weighing to others cries out with anguish if others were dishonest with him.

In this *sūrah*, the Qur'ān while presenting this aspect of human nature as evidence has reminded us of a basic reality: when the Almighty Himself is just and He has created in human beings a liking for justice and goodness, it is essential that He bring forth a day in which He reward those who honour and value this light within their nature and punish those who do not do so.

At a number of places, the Qur'ān has adopted this style of reasoning in favour of the Day of Judgement and I have been explaining this all through. In this regard, readers can take a look at what I have written under the following verse of Sūrah Qiyāmah: بَلِّ الْإِنْسَانُ عَلَى نَفْسِهِ بَصِيرَةً وَلَوْ (in fact, man himself is a witness upon his own self (٧٥: ١٤-١٥))

however much he may put up excuses, (75:14-15)).

Analysis of the Discourse

Following is the sequence of the discourse adopted:

Verses (1-6): An expression of regret on people who want that no one should be unjust to them but who themselves deal unjustly with others. It was only in accordance with justice that they should not like for others what they do not like for themselves. This attitude of theirs shows that they do not expect the Day of Judgement to come when people will be raised before their Lord.

Verses (7-17): A mention of the fate of the defiant who had denied reward and punishment and had spent their lives in disobedience to the Almighty.

Verses (18-28): A mention of the fate of those loyal to God who professed faith in the Hereafter and who spent their lives while being fearful of the Almighty.

Verses (29-36): A portrayal of the transformed state of affairs which every one will face one day: today the disbelievers do not care about anyone except their own selves and are making fun of the believers; however, on that day, the believers will be the joyous lot and will make fun of the disbelievers.

Text and Translation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
وَيْلٌ لِّلْمُطَفِّفِينَ (١) الَّذِينَ إِذَا أَكْتَالُوا عَلَى النَّاسِ يَسْتَوْفُونَ (٢) وَإِذَا كَالُوهُمْ أَوْ وَزَنُوهُمْ يُخْسِرُونَ (٣) أَلَا يَظُنُّ أُولَئِكَ أَنَّهُمْ مَبْعُوثُونَ (٤) لِيَوْمٍ عَظِيمٍ (٥) يَوْمَ يَقُومُ النَّاسُ لِرَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ (٦) كَلَّا إِنَّ كِتَابَ الْفُجَارِ لَفِي سِجِّينٍ (٧) وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا سِجِّينُ (٨) كِتَابٌ مَّرْقُومٌ (٩) وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِّلْمُكَذِّبِينَ (١٠) الَّذِينَ يُكْذِبُونَ بِيَوْمِ الدِّينِ (١١) وَمَا يُكْذَبُ بِهِ إِلَّا كُلُّ مُعْتَدٍ أَثِيمٍ (١٢) إِذَا تُتْلَى عَلَيْهِ آيَاتُنَا قَالَ أَسَاطِيرُ الْأَوَّلِينَ (١٣) كَلَّا بَلْ رَانَ عَلَى قُلُوبِهِمْ مَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ (١٤) كَلَّا إِنَّهُمْ عَنْ رَبِّهِمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ لَمَحْجُوبُونَ (١٥) ثُمَّ إِنَّهُمْ لَصَالُوا الْجَحِيمِ (١٦) ثُمَّ يُقَالُ هَذَا الَّذِي كُنْتُمْ بِهِ تُكَذِّبُونَ (١٧) كَلَّا إِنَّ كِتَابَ الْأَبْرَارِ لَفِي عِلِّيَّينَ (١٨) وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا عِلِّيُّونَ (١٩) كِتَابٌ مَّرْقُومٌ (٢٠) يَشْهَدُهُ الْمُقَرَّبُونَ (٢١) إِنَّ الْأَبْرَارَ لَفِي نَعِيمٍ (٢٢) عَلَى الْأَرَائِكِ يَنْظُرُونَ (٢٣) تَعْرِفُ فِي وُجُوهِهِمْ نَضْرَةَ النَّعِيمِ (٢٤) يُسْقَوْنَ مِنْ رَحِيقٍ مَخْتُومٍ (٢٥) خِتَامُهُ مِسْكٌ وَفِي ذَلِكَ فَلْيَتَنَافَسِ الْمُتَنَافِسُونَ (٢٦)

وَمِزَاجُهُ مِنْ تَسْنِيمٍ (٢٧) عَيْنًا يَشْرَبُ بِهَا الْمُقَرَّبُونَ (٢٨) إِنَّ الَّذِينَ أَجْرَمُوا كَانُوا مِنَ
الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا يُضْحَكُونَ (٢٩) وَإِذَا مَرُّوا بِهِمْ يَتَغَامَزُونَ (٣٠) وَإِذَا انْقَلَبُوا إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهِمْ
انْقَلَبُوا فَكِهِينَ (٣١) وَإِذَا رَأَوْهُمْ قَالُوا إِنَّ هَؤُلَاءِ لَضَالُّونَ (٣٢) وَمَا أُرْسِلُوا عَلَيْهِمْ
حَافِظِينَ (٣٣) فَالْيَوْمَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنَ الْكُفَّارِ يَضْحَكُونَ (٣٤) عَلَى الْأَرَائِكِ يَنْظُرُونَ
(٣٥) هَلْ تُؤِثُّبَ الْكُفَّارُ مَا كَانُوا يَفْعَلُونَ (٣٦)

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Ever Merciful.

Woe be to those who weigh and measure less! Who exact full measure when they take from others, and when they measure or weigh for others give less than what is due. Do these people not think that they will be raised up one day for presence in a great day? On the day when men will rise to stand up before the Lord of the worlds. (1-6)

Certainly not! Indeed, the record of the disobedient shall be in the *sijjīn*. And what have you understood what the *sijjīn* is? A written register. Devastation shall be on that Day upon those who deny the Day of Retribution. Only they deny this Day who are unjust and usurp rights. When Our verses are recited to him, he says: “Tales of the ancients.” Certainly not! In fact, the rust of their deeds has settled on their hearts. Certainly not! On that Day, they shall surely be held away from their Lord. Then they shall be the ones who enter Hell. Then it shall be said to them: “This is what you have been denying.” (7-17)

Certainly not! Indeed, the record of the righteous shall be in the *‘illiyyīn*. And what do you understood what the *‘illiyyīn* is? A written register. In custody of the favoured ones. Indeed, the righteous shall be in bliss, reclining on thrones gazing around. The freshness of delight will reflect from their faces. Pure sealed wine shall be given to them to drink; the seal will be of musk. And it is for this thing, those who wish to strive, should strive with enthusiasm. And it will be mixed with *tasnīm*, a special spring on whose banks these favoured ones shall sit and drink. (18-28)

Those who remained sinners used to laugh at those who believed and used to make gestures through furtive glances when they passed them by. And when they would return to their people, they would return engrossed. And when they would see them, they would say: “Indeed, they are the strayed ones.” They were not sent to be their guardians. But today these believers will laugh at these disbelievers, reclining on thrones gazing around – Why! Have not the disbelievers been duly rewarded for what they did? (29-36)

Explanation

وَيْلٌ لِّلْمُطَفِّفِينَ (١)¹

This sentence is not merely a statement of fact; curse and censure are also concealed in it. The word *تُطَفِّفُ* refers to measuring and weighing less.

الَّذِينَ إِذَا اكْتَالُوا عَلَى النَّاسِ يَسْتَوْفُونَ (٢) وَإِذَا كَالُوهُمْ أَوْ وَزَنُوهُمْ يُخْسِرُونَ (٣)²

Mentioned here is a certain trait of people who weigh and measure less. It is evident from this mention that the objective is not merely to delineate this trait but to bring out a certain feature: a person is very sensitive and vigilant that others should weigh and measure correctly for him and would never like any dishonesty in this matter; however, when this very person weighs and measures for others he has no qualms in being dishonest. It is evident from this feature of a person that he is not devoid of the conception of justice and the fact that it must necessarily be administered; he knows full well that honesty should be observed in both cases at all costs; moreover, he fully knows that he should not like for others what he does not like for himself; when he becomes dishonest in such cases, then he in fact goes against his own nature purely being overwhelmed with selfishness. This of course is open injustice and a very mean thing.

It is evident from this discussion that the Creator has placed a barometer in a person to differentiate between oppression and justice and He has also put in him a disliking for the former and a liking for the latter. If even after this awareness, he commits oppression it is not because he is not able to distinguish between the two or because he is not aware whether oppression is in fact oppression; the real reason, as pointed out above, is because he is so overcome by some desire or emotion that he is unable to maintain a balance.

To elaborate the point discussed in these verses, one can say that when a thief steals something from someone's house, he would never want anyone to steal from his own house; similarly, a murderer who kills someone would never want that someone be after his life or that of his near ones. Similarly, an adulterer who violates the honour of a lady will never be happy if someone attacks the honour of his own wife. In fact, if all these thieves, murderers and adulterers are inquired to express their impartial opinion, they will even confess that there should be no place in the society for thieves, murderers and adulterers and other such

1. Woe be to those who weigh and measure less!

2. Who exact full measure when they take from others, and when they measure or weigh for others give less than what is due.

criminals. Only those people should be members of a society who protect the life, wealth and integrity of others the way they would desire the protection of their own life, wealth and integrity.

This attitude of a person and this aspect of his nature bears obvious evidence to the fact that neither does he regard good and evil to be alike nor is he satisfied with the equal treatment of the two. His impartial verdict is that both should be dealt with in a different manner. An obvious corollary of this is that the Almighty should bring about a day in which He deals with the righteous and the wrong-doers according to their deeds. If He does not do so, it would mean that the righteous and the wrong-doers are equal in spite of the fact that this would be against the nature endowed by the Creator to human beings. Here, in this verse, it is this human nature which is presented as evidence to prove the certitude of reward and punishment. By doing so, the Qur'ān has actually borne witness against the rejecters of the Day of Judgement who are bent upon denying the warnings of the Qur'ān regarding the Day of Judgement even though they are not able to deny this evidence of their own nature.

While explaining this verse, our exegetes have cited a narrative which says that the Anṣār tribe was plagued with the evil habit of weighing and measuring dishonestly; it was this situation that occasioned the revelation of this verse. However, firstly, this *sūrah* is Makkan and not Madīnan. Moreover, even if it is supposed that this bad habit was found in the Anṣār, then it could only have been to the extent that it was found in the Makkans. In fact, there was a much greater chance of it to be found in the Makkans because they were generally traders by profession whereas the real profession of the Anṣār was agriculture. The strongest point is that the purport of this verse is not meant to censure weighing and measuring less. It is, in fact, meant to state the fact that a person is fully capable of distinguishing justice from injustice, as is indicated earlier. If he does evil, he goes against the evidence borne by his nature to quench some base desire. This nature of a human being entails that a day come in which the righteous and the wicked are completely discriminated from one another. If a person denies such a day, then the only reason for this attitude is that he wants to evade facing reward and punishment even though this is a demand of his nature.

أَلَا يَظُنُّ أُولَئِكَ أَنَّهُمْ مَبْعُوثُونَ (٤) لِيَوْمٍ عَظِيمٍ (٥) يَوْمَ يَقُومُ النَّاسُ لِرَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ (٦)³

These verses express wonder at the attitude adopted by the

3. Do these people not think that they will be raised up one day for presence in a great day? On the day when men will rise to stand up before the Lord of the worlds.

disbelievers. Everyone should be fearful of such a day since their own nature bears testimony to its advent. If a person does not have this fear in him, then it only means that he has turned a deaf ear to the calls of his own nature. The fact of the matter is that it will not be an ordinary day: it will be a great day, for people will rise on that day and will face the Creator of the worlds. They will be held accountable for their deeds and then rewarded or punished accordingly.

The arguments concealed in the expression رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ about the majesty and need of such a day and the verdicts given therein have been explained at many places in this *tafsīr*; readers are advised to refresh them in their minds in order to appreciate the stress in these words.

كَلَّا إِنَّ كِتَابَ الْفُجَّارِ لَفِي سِجِّينٍ (٧)⁴

The word كَلَّا (certainly not!) is meant to express the erroneous notion of the addressees mentioned above viz. having no fear of the advent of day of accountability and reward and punishment in which the righteous will be distinguished from the wrong-doers. On the contrary, they think that no such day will come and if ever it does, they will be blessed with more favours because of their own noble creed and their deities. These verses address them and refute their notions: they are told that they should not ruin their fate by becoming entangled in such childish views; on that day, the righteous and the wrong-doers will be as far apart from one another as the East and the West are. The record of the wrong-doers will be in the *sijjīn* (سِجِّين) while that of the righteous, as referred to in the subsequent verse, will be in the *'illiyūn*.

وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا سِجِّينٌ (٨) كِتَابٌ مَرْقُومٌ (٩)⁵

The word *sijjīn* (سِجِّين) in the previous verse is not in its literal meaning; it is used as a name and therefore the Qur'ān has itself explained what it refers to. Such names occur in the Qur'ān at a number of places, and at all places the Qur'ān has explained what they refer to. Some examples can be seen in Sūrah Dahr.⁶ Further ahead in this *sūrah*, the words *'illiyūn* and *tasnīm* are also similar examples. As explained earlier, it is the connotation of these words as terms which is implied here and not their literal meaning.

4. Certainly not! Indeed, the record of the disobedient shall be in the *sijjīn*.

5. And what have you understood what the *sijjīn* is? A written register.

6. For example *salsabīl* and *zanjabīl* mentioned in verses seventeen and eighteen and respectively of Sūrah Dahr.

The sentence وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا سِجِّينٌ (and what have you understood what the *sijjīn* is?) is meant to express the awe and dread found in the word *sijjīn* (سِجِّين). The addressees should not regard it to be something ordinary; they should remember that he whose name or deeds are recorded in it shall be doomed.

The verse كِتَابٌ مَرْفُومٌ (a written register) states that it is a written record of the sinners. The qualification that this record is preserved in writing is meant to refer to the fact that there is no possibility of any error in it nor is there doubt in its certainty. Thus, *sijjīn* (سِجِّين) is actually the name of the register in which the record of all the deeds of the sinners is being preserved in writing; it is on the basis of this record that it will be decided on the Day of Judgement about the category of Hell in which a person will be thrown into. The word *sijjīn* (سِجِّين) is from سَجَنَ (*sijn*) which means “a jail”. It is because of this root meaning of the word that the name of the register which records the deeds of the sinners is called *sijjīn* (سِجِّين).

وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِّلْمُكَذِّبِينَ (١٠) الَّذِينَ يُكْذِّبُونَ بَيَوْمَ الدِّينِ (١١)⁷

The addressees are warned that they should not be deceived by the fact that if today no one is calling them to account, no one ever will; once the day of reward and punishment arrives, those who rejected it will be doomed. On that day, they will see that neither were any of their words and deeds left out from their record nor is there any way of being shielded from doom. When these sinners will see their record, they will cry out: مَالِ هَٰذَا الْكِتَابِ لَا يُغَادِرُ صَغِيرَةً وَلَا كَبِيرَةً إِلَّا أَحْصَاهَا (١٨:٤٩) (what a strange book this is; it has not left out any small or great thing in its record, (18:49)).

وَمَا يُكَذِّبُ بِهِ إِلَّا كُلُّ مُعْتَدٍ أَثِيمٍ (١٢)⁸

In this verse, the type of people which are the most active in denying the Day of Judgement are identified. The implication of the verse is that no person can dare deny this day who has even the slightest semblance of justice and mercy in him. Every person's own nature testifies to such a day of accountability and no external evidence is required for its proof. A person can just see its reflection in the mirror of his heart. However, people whose hearts are defiled by the rust of usurpation and transgression are unable to envision it.

I have already explained the meanings of اِعْتَدَاءَ (*i'tidā'*) and اِثْمٍ (*ithm*) at various places in this *tafsīr*. The former refers to a person who seizes

7. Devastation shall be on that Day upon those who deny the Day of Retribution.

8. Only they deny this Day who are unjust and usurp rights.

the rights of others while the latter refers to a person who does not discharge the rights of others imposed on him. People who become used to usurping the rights of others or do not discharge the rights of others imposed on them, try to find out some way to evade reward and punishment so that their conscience is not pricked by their injustices mentioned in this verse.

I have indicated earlier that a person does not evade a reality merely because he could not find an argument in its support; he actually adopts this attitude because by accepting it his own desires and habits are adversely affected. As long as he does not want to accept a reality, he keeps on inventing excuses for himself however lame they may be. In Sūrah Qiyāmah, this attitude is referred to in the following words: *بَلِّ الْإِنْسَانُ عَلَىٰ نَفْسِهِ بَصِيرَةٌ وَلَوْ أَلْفَىٰ مَعَاذِيرُهُ* (٧٥: ١٤-١٥) (in fact, man himself is a witness upon his own self however much he may put up excuses, (75:14-15)).

إِذَا تُلِيَتْ عَلَيْهِ آيَاتُنَا قَالَ أَسَاطِيرُ الْأَوَّلِينَ (١٣)⁹

Here, in this verse, the manners in which the disbelievers deny the Day of Judgement is highlighted: they refute a reality even though this attitude is against the calls of their conscience; they have no arguments for this denial. So instead of responding to reasoning through reasoning, they only express stubbornness and obduracy and humiliatingly regard the verses of God recited out to them to be tales of antiquity.

The word *آيَات* refers to the arguments and reasons which the Qur'ān was informing them to substantiate the Day of Judgement. These arguments are mentioned in the previous verses and also in the subsequent ones. There is also a mention of the nations which were destroyed as a result of denying the warnings of the Hereafter. They would deny these warnings by just saying a single sentence: "They are tales of olden times; none of them is worth paying heed to."

كَلَّا بَلِّ رَانَ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِمْ مَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ (١٤)¹⁰

In this verse, the Qur'ān has stressed that it is wrong of these foolish people to regard the verses of the Qur'ān as tales of antiquity. What it is informing them of are undeniable facts which are evidenced by the world around man and that within him as well by his intellect but such is the extent of the rust which has settled on their hearts that not even a speck of truth can pierce it.

The expression *مَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ* refers to their deeds that we have

9. When Our verses are recited to him, he says: "Tales of the ancients."

10. Certainly not! In fact, the rust of their deeds has settled on their hearts.

alluded to above in verse twelve under *إِعْتِدَاء* (*i'tidā'*) and *إِثْم* (*ithm*) about which the Qur'ān has testified that the person who perpetrates these always tries to find an excuse to deny reward and punishment.

Mentioned in *كَلَّا بَلْ رَانَ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِمْ* is the practice of God I have alluded to at various places in the Qur'ān: if a person honours and values the arguments the Almighty has ingrained in human nature and uses the faculty of intellect He has given him, these things will be of benefit to him. However, if he does not use these things and instead starts following his base desires, then gradually the rust of his misdeeds begins to settle on these faculties and slowly engulfs them to the extent that nothing is able to make its way into them.

¹¹ *كَلَّا إِنَّهُمْ عَنْ رَبِّهِمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ لَمَحْجُوبُونَ (١٥)*

This verse refutes a baseless desire of the disbelievers: if ever the Hereafter is to come, they will be blessed with position and status there too the way they have been here; on the contrary, they will be punished for keeping the eyes of their hearts and minds shut; this punishment will be that they will be held away from their Lord, which in other words means that they will be deprived of His blessings and favours and of observing Him; they will not even get the chance to plead with their Lord.

¹² *ثُمَّ إِنَّهُمْ لَصَالُوا الْجَحِيمِ (١٦) ثُمَّ يُقَالُ هَذَا الَّذِي كُنْتُمْ بِهِ تُكَذِّبُونَ (١٧)*

The repetition of the word *ثُمَّ* in these verses shows that they would be told these things in an emphatic manner and the purpose would be to humiliate them. They shall taste the consequences of what they had been vehemently denying in the previous world.

¹³ *كَلَّا إِنَّ كِتَابَ الْأَبْرَارِ لَفِي عِلِّيَّينَ (١٨)*

The word *كَلَّا* (certainly not!) is meant to dispel the false notion of the rejecters of the Day of Judgement the way it is in verse seven which is that the righteous and the wrong-doers will be equal; just as there will be a specific register for the wrong-doers, there will a specific register for the righteous. The latter's record of deeds will be in the *'illiyyūn*.

11. Certainly not! On that Day, they shall surely be held away from their Lord.

12. Then they shall be the ones who enter Hell. Then it shall be said to them: "This is what you have been denying."

13. Certainly not! Indeed, the record of the righteous shall be in the *'illiyyūn*.

وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا عَلَيُّونَ (١٩)¹⁴

Just as in an earlier verse, this style is adopted to mention *sijjīn* in order to strike awe and fear, here this very style is adopted to convey the grandeur and magnificence of ‘illiyyūn. The implication is that how can one imagine its splendour in this world: it is a register of the exalted ones in which there will be a record of their deeds.

كِتَابٌ مَرْفُومٌ (٢٠) يَشْهَدُهُ الْمُقَرَّبُونَ (٢١)¹⁵

Since the word ‘illiyyūn is not used in its literal sense but used as a term, the verse explains what it refers to: it is a record which contains each and every detail and it is in the custody of exalted angels.

Another meaning of يَشْهَدُهُ الْمُقَرَّبُونَ can be that since this record would only be for the favoured ones, only they would be able to come and see it; no one else would have access to it. Verse twenty eight mentions the favoured ones.

إِنَّ الْأَبْرَارَ لَفِي نَعِيمٍ (٢٢) عَلَى الْأَرَائِكِ يَنْظُرُونَ (٢٣)¹⁶

These verses mention the favour the righteous will enjoy. I have already explained the expression فِي نَعِيمٍ in this *tafsīr*: it refers to the fact that blessings will engulf the believers from all sides. Wherever they are able to turn their gazes, they will find favours and blessings around them.

Consider next the verse: عَلَى الْأَرَائِكِ يَنْظُرُونَ (reclining on thrones gazing around). In an earlier verse, it is stated about the wrong-doers: كَلَّا إِنَّهُمْ عَنْ رَبِّهِمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ لَمَحْجُوبُونَ (certainly not! on that Day, they shall surely be held away from their Lord.) Here, in this verse, it is stated that the righteous, on the contrary, will recline on thrones and witness the favour and blessings of God and observe His grandeur and various manifestations. Further ahead in the *sūrah*, it is also explained that while sitting on thrones they will also be shown the fate of their enemies. The relevant verses read عَلَى الْأَرَائِكِ يَنْظُرُونَ هَلْ تُؤْثِرُونَ عَلَى الْكَافِرِ مَا كَانُوا يَفْعَلُونَ (٣٦-٣٥) (reclining on thrones gazing around -- why! have not the disbelievers been duly rewarded for what they did? ((35-36)

تَعْرِفُ فِي وُجُوهِهِمْ نَضْرَةَ النَّعِيمِ (٢٤)¹⁷

The word نَضْرَةٌ refers to freshness and bloom that reflects on the faces

14. And what have you understood what the ‘illiyyūn is?

15. A written register. In custody of the favoured ones.

16. Indeed, the righteous shall be in bliss, reclining on thrones gazing around.

17. The freshness of delight will reflect from their faces.

of those who are engulfed with favours from all sides. Every one who sees these people will witness this freshness on their faces.

يُسْقَوْنَ مِنْ رَحِيقٍ مَخْتُومٍ (٢٥) خَتَامُهُ مِسْكٌ وَفِي ذَلِكَ فَلْيَتَنَافَسِ الْمُتَنَافِسُونَ (٢٦)¹⁸

Among these favours, one is mentioned as an example: pure wine will be given to them as a drink. This wine will be sealed with musk and it will be opened for them.

Obviously, these few features of wine are mentioned to give a general concept of this wine. Only those people will have an idea of its actual taste and characteristics who will get the opportunity to drink it. It is emphasized that to be able to be in a position to drink this wine is what all efforts should be directed at. This is not only an exhortation for the believers, it is also a sarcastic remark on people who are slaves of this world: all their efforts are expended to earn the transient pleasures of this world and there is no one to desire things that should really be desired.

وَمِرْاجُهُ مِنْ تَسْنِيمٍ (٢٧) عَيْنًا يَشْرَبُ بِهَا الْمُقَرَّبُونَ (٢٨)¹⁹

The word مِرْاج refers to a liquid which is mixed with alcohol to increase its serene effects or to make it more moderate.

The word عَيْنًا is declined in the accusative because of specification (*naṣb ‘ala al-ikhtiṣāṣ*) and the particle بِهَا is an adverb of place. I have already explained this style in the *tafsīr* of Sūrah Dahr (76:6). The most appropriate place to drink wine is on a river bank. The wretched wine of this world is drunk wherever and in whatever form those fond of it are able to lay their hands on it; however, in the Hereafter, pure wine will be drunk by the favoured ones of God and the etiquette of this consumption has its own unique norms.

Our exegetes have not been able to determine the true connotation of the particle بِ. So either they have not discussed it or have erroneously interpreted it. The relevant expression is generally translated as: “They drink from it.” However, this translation is absolutely meaningless. If this is understood to mean that they drink from this fountain, then this has already been clearly expressed in مِرْاجُهُ مِنْ تَسْنِيمٍ. So why should it be repeated in a very vague manner. It may be worth noting that in eloquent Arabic, it is very customary for the particle بِ to connote an adverb of

18. Pure sealed wine shall be given to them to drink; the seal will be of musk. And it is for this thing that those who wish to strive, should strive with enthusiasm.

19. And it will be mixed with *tasnīm*, a special spring on whose banks these favoured ones shall sit and drink.

place (ẓarf). In particular, in such instances, there is no other possibility than to interpret it in this manner.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ أَجْرَمُوا كَانُوا مِنَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا يَضْحَكُونَ (٢٩)²⁰

This is a portrayal of the reversal of situation which will take place when the results of the deeds of the sinners and the righteous will be declared. This verse depicts what poor Muslims had to go through in this world at the hands of the conceited rich.

وَإِذَا مَرُّوا بِهِمْ يَتَغَامَزُونَ (٣٠)²¹

This can refer both to the fact that when these believers passed by them or when the arrogant leaders of the Quraysh passed by the Muslims, they would wink at one another and thereby hurt them in this fashion. It is evident that the hurt caused by the stare is much greater than the wound inflicted by the sword and the spear. The stare is a special weapon of humiliating and debasing people. *Inshallāh* I will discuss some aspects of this in the *tafsīr* of Sūrah Humazah.

وَإِذَا انْقَلَبُوا إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهِمْ انْقَلَبُوا فَكِهِينَ (٣١)²²

The implication is that when they return to their people after misbehaving with the believers they return engrossed as if they had achieved some great success. This is in fact a reference to their meanness: instead of feeling ashamed on their misbehaviour, they would boast before their household how they disgraced others. In Sūrah Qiyāmah, this aspect is mentioned thus: وَلَكِنْ كَذَّبَ وَتَوَلَّى ثُمَّ دَهَبَ إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهِ يَتَمَطَّى (٧٥: ٣٢-٣٣) (he denied the truth and, turning his back, went to his kinsfolk elated with pride, (75:32-33)).

Here one should keep in mind a characteristic of the believers mentioned in the Qur'ān: they would always spend their lives among their family in a very cautious manner so that any attitude of theirs should not give a wrong lesson to others. For this would lead both them and those influenced by them in such a manner to doom in the Hereafter. On the contrary, when these mischievous people which the verse mentions would go to their family after harassing the believers, they would boastfully narrate their pranks so that their next generation also is led to follow their evil ways.

20. Those who remained sinners used to laugh at those who believed.

21. And used to make gestures through furtive glances when they passed them by.

22. And when they would return to their people, they would return engrossed.

وَإِذَا رَأَوْهُمْ قَالُوا إِنَّ هَؤُلَاءِ لَضَالُّونَ (٣٢)²³

The arrogant leadership of the Quraysh would also try to make sure that no one should display a positive attitude in any form towards the believers. Therefore, whenever they would see them, they would try to convince other people that these believers have totally gone astray because they are the enemies of their ancestral religion and regard all others except themselves as the fuel of Hell. It should be kept in mind that many people were positively influenced by seeing the deep roots of the belief in the Hereafter in the Muslims. The Quraysh tried to counter this by trying to prove to such people that these Muslims are irreligious people who are deep in error. At various places in this *tafsīr*, I have already alluded to the arguments which they fabricated to support this scheme of theirs.

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ حَافِظِينَ (٣٣)²⁴

Generally people have understood this verse to mean that these disbelievers were not deputed as the guardians and teachers over Muslims that they may regard them as a strayed lot and censure their beliefs and deeds. In my opinion, this sentence is actually a part of the words uttered by the disbelievers. The complete discourse will be something like this: When they would see the Muslims, they would remark that these Muslims are deviants from the straight path; they regard their deeds [ie of the disbelievers] to be polytheistic and mere disbelief although these Muslims have not been deputed as guardians over them that they object to every deed of theirs and take upon themselves to reform them [ie the disbelievers].”

فَالْيَوْمَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنَ الْكُفَّارِ يَضْحَكُونَ (٣٤)²⁵

After a portrayal of the attitude adopted by the disbelievers, this verse now mentions the reversal of fortunes which will take place on the Day of Judgement. In this world, it was the disbelievers who would laugh at the believers; but on that day, it would be the other way round. This making fun by the believers would be in line with justice: when the believers had communicated the truth to them to the extent that they were left with no excuse to deny it and they still did not mend their ways

23. And when they would see them, they would say: Indeed, they are the strayed ones.

24. They were not sent to be their guardians.

25. But today these believers will laugh at these disbelievers.

and on the contrary regarded the believers to be criminals, then they are only worthy of not being shown any sympathy.

عَلَى الْأَرَائِكِ يَنْظُرُونَ (٣٥)²⁶

The implication of this verse is that just as the believers would be able to observe the favours and blessings of God while merely being seated on their thrones, they would also while sitting there be able to peep into Hell to see what the disbelievers are passing through; in fact, they would even be able to question them as is specified elsewhere in the Qur'ān.

هَلْ تُؤْتَوْنَ الْكَفَّارَ مَا كَانُوا يَفْعَلُونَ (٣٦)²⁷

After receiving all these favours, the believers would be asked the question mentioned in this verse merely to receive confirmation from them.

The expression مَا كَانُوا يَفْعَلُونَ also includes the misbehaviour of the disbelievers mentioned earlier.

With these lines, the *tafsīr* of this *sūrah* comes to its completion. فَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ عَلَى فَضْلِهِ وَإِحْسَانِهِ (so gratitude be to God for his blessings and favours).

Raḥmānābād,

14th August 1979 AD,

20th Ramadān al-Mubārak, 1399 AH

26. Reclining on thrones gazing around.

27. – Why! Have not the disbelievers been duly rewarded for what they did?

Sūrah Inshiqāq

Central Theme and Relationship with the Preceding Sūrah

There exists an obvious meaningful relationship between this *sūrah* and the previous one: Sūrah Muṭaffifīn. Just as the rejecters of reward and punishment are warned in the previous *sūrah*, they are cautioned and prodded in this *sūrah* too. It was stated in the previous *sūrah* that a day will definitely come when the Almighty will divide people in separate groups on the basis of their faith and deeds. Those who had remained obedient to him and were pious would be blessed with an eternal kingdom; on the other hand, those who remained defiant and disobedient to Him will face eternal humiliation. This *sūrah* also mentions that people will be divided into two groups: one of them will be handed over their accounts in their right hands and they will receive eternal success and the other will be handed over their accounts from behind into their left hands and they will face everlasting disgrace.

Both *sūrahs* address the affluent and wealthy sections of the society who were caught in the notion that there will be no day of reward and punishment in the first place, and if it ever comes they will be recipients of honour and status on that day just as they are blessed with them in this world. They are told that man's nature is not devoid of the awareness of justice and the Almighty has not made this world without a purpose. Therefore, it is essential that a day come in which the righteous are sorted out from the wrongdoers. On that day, those who lead their lives whilst ignoring this obvious reality will be doomed.

The basis of reasoning in the previous *sūrah* is human nature, as is explained in its *tafsīr*, and, in this *sūrah*, this reasoning is based on certain signs of the physical world.

Analysis of the Discourse

Following is the sequence adopted in the discourse:

Verses (1-5): A brief mention of the cataclysm that will take place in the heavens and in the earth at the advent of the Day of Judgement and an explanation of the fact that on that day neither the heavens will dare disobey the Almighty nor the earth. Both will obey their Lord without any hesitation whatsoever and this attitude is but befitting for them. When God has created them, it is their obligation towards Him to obey Him.

Verses (6-15): Man is rebuked that he is being relentlessly pulled to encounter His Lord and meet his fate. On that day, people whose account is given in their right hands will have an easy reckoning and will happily meet their people. However, those who regarded this world to be their real destination and led a life of indifference to their actual destination will be in trouble. They will be handed down their accounts from behind. At every step, they will be faced with doom and perdition.

Verses (16-21): Evidence is presented from some physical phenomena of this world to show that everything in this world progresses gradually and everything at all times is in the grasp of God. Man too is gradually moving forward to meet his Lord and one day he will have to face Him. If he is not accepting this verdict of the Qur'ān, then it is only his foolishness.

Verses (22-25): People who are adamant in rejecting the Qur'ān are warned and those who have embraced faith and are doing righteous deeds after affirming the warnings of the Qur'ān are given glad tidings.

Text and Translation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

إِذَا السَّمَاءُ انشَقَّتْ (١) وَأَذْنَتْ لِرَبِّهَا وَحُقَّتْ (٢) وَإِذَا الْأَرْضُ مُدَّتْ (٣) وَأَلْقَتْ مَا فِيهَا وَتَخَلَّتْ (٤) وَأَذْنَتْ لِرَبِّهَا وَحُقَّتْ (٥) يَا أَيُّهَا الْإِنْسَانُ إِنَّكَ كَادِحٌ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ كَدْحًا فَمُلَاقِيهِ (٦) فَأَمَّا مَنْ أُوْتِيَ كِتَابَهُ بِيَمِينِهِ (٧) فَسَوْفَ يُحَاسَبُ حِسَابًا يَسِيرًا (٨) وَيَنْقَلِبُ إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهِ مَسْرُورًا (٩) وَأَمَّا مَنْ أُوْتِيَ كِتَابَهُ وَرَاءَ ظَهْرِهِ (١٠) فَسَوْفَ يَدْعُو ثُبُورًا (١١) وَيَصْلَىٰ سَعِيرًا (١٢) إِنَّهُ كَانَ فِي أَهْلِهِ مَسْرُورًا (١٣) إِنَّهُ ظَنَّ أَن لَّنْ يَحُورَ (١٤) بَلَىٰ إِنَّ رَبَّهُ كَانَ بِهِ بَصِيرًا (١٥) فَلَا أَقْسِمُ بِالشَّفَقِ (١٦) وَاللَّيْلِ وَمَا وَسَقَ (١٧) وَالْقَمَرِ إِذَا اتَّسَقَ (١٨) لَتَرْكَبُنَّ طَبَقًا عَن طَبَقٍ (١٩) فَمَا لَهُمْ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ (٢٠) وَإِذَا قُرِئَ عَلَيْهِمُ الْقُرْآنُ لَا يَسْجُدُونَ (٢١) بَلِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا يُكَذِّبُونَ (٢٢) وَاللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا يُوعُونَ (٢٣) فَبَشِّرْهُمْ بِعَذَابٍ أَلِيمٍ (٢٤) إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَهُمْ أَجْرٌ غَيْرُ مَمْنُونٍ (٢٥)

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Ever Merciful

When the sky is rent asunder and obeys its Lord's command and this only is befitting for it. And when the earth is stretched out and casts out all things within it and becomes empty and obeys its Lord and this is what it should do. (1-5)

O Man! You also are being dragged relentlessly towards your Lord and

are going to meet Him. Then he whose record is given to him in his right hand will receive an easy reckoning, and he will go back to his people rejoicing. As for he whose record is handed out to him from behind his back, he will call for death and shall enter Hell. He remained engrossed among his kinfolk. He thought that he would never have to return. Yes, why not? His Lord was fully watching over him. (6-15)

Therefore, this is not so. I swear by the glow of the sunset, and the night and the objects it envelops, and the moon when it grows full that you shall certainly ascend gradually. (16-19)

So what has come over them that they are not professing faith, and when the Qur'ān is recited before them they do not fall down in prostration! In fact those who have disbelieved are denying; and Allah knows full well what they are accumulating. So give them glad tidings of a painful torment. For those, however, who accepted faith and did righteous deeds there is eternal reward. (20-25)

Text and Explanation

إِذَا السَّمَاءُ انشَقَّتْ (١) وَأَذْنَتْ لِرَبِّهَا وَحُقَّتْ (٢)¹

The new world which will be created after the Day of Judgement will have new physical laws; the existing world of these heavens and the earth will be annihilated before this happens, as is alluded to in the Qur'ān.²

The words إِذَا السَّمَاءُ انشَقَّتْ convey the same meanings as the words إِذَا السَّمَاءُ انْفَطَرَتْ (٨٢:١) of Sūrah Infiṭār do. Today it is not possible to estimate the nature of this greatest turmoil that will ever take place in his universe. The Qur'ān has mentioned this upheaval to alarm those foolish and naïve people who were very proud of their fortresses and palaces. They were not being able to comprehend how such strong structures would be dented. They are informed that the very heavens and the earth in which they have built their palaces, edifices, fortresses and castles would be destroyed what to speak of these structures themselves.

In the expression وَأَذْنَتْ لِرَبِّهَا وَحُقَّتْ the words لَهُ أَذِنَ mean لَهُ إِسْتَمَعَ (he accepted what he said; he obeyed his directive).

The words لَهُ حَقٌّ mean that it is essential for it to do this; it is befitting

1. When the sky is rent asunder and obeys its Lord's command and this only is befitting for it.

2. Reference is to the following verse:

يَوْمَ تُبَدَّلُ الْأَرْضُ غَيْرَ الْأَرْضِ وَالسَّمَاوَاتُ (٤٨:١٤)

Keep in mind the day when the earth is changed into a different earth and the heavens also. (14:48)

for it to carry out this task.

The implication is that people should come out of their ignorant attitude of regarding the heavens and the earth as invincible. On that day, they will be reduced to pieces at the behest of their Lord. They will be asked by their God and they will obey Him without any hesitation whatsoever. The words *وَحُقَّتْ* mean that it is essential for it to do so. When the Almighty has created it, how is it becoming for the sky to disobey its Creator.

These sentences are meant to admonish and instruct these conceited elements who were ready to engage in a heated discussion on every point. They are warned instantaneously that the sky will be shattered to pieces at the behest of its Lord and this is truly befitting of it; the naïve who are only a trivial speck below this sky should contemplate how the attitude they have adopted can be regarded as correct: they have the false notion that no one would be able to displace them from their places when they would get up to fight God.

وَإِذَا الْأَرْضُ مُدَّتْ (٣) وَأَلْقَتْ مَا فِيهَا وَتَخَلَّتْ (٤) وَأَذْنَتْ لِرَبِّهَا وَحُقَّتْ (٥)³

After the skies, a mention is now made of what will happen to the earth. The implication is that whilst today in this world this earth is uneven; it has many peaks and valleys, highlands and lowlands, seas and mountains and there are several things which are hidden in its crests and troughs and folds; however, on that day this earth will be stretched out like a sheet of cloth and it will expel whatever is hidden in its folds; this reference is specially to raising of the dead, but the style adopted is general. It includes everything that is buried in it including the treasures of the affluent who are specially addressed in this *sūrah*.

The expression *وَأَلْقَتْ مَا فِيهَا وَتَخَلَّتْ* (and casts out all things within her and becomes empty) also gives the impression that the earth is burdened with all these things just as a pregnant lady is burdened with the child she is carrying. Consequently, it will feel the same relief in shedding its burden as is felt by a pregnant lady once she has given birth.

The verse *وَأَذْنَتْ لِرَبِّهَا وَحُقَّتْ* (and obeys its Lord and this is what it should do) has already been explained above. It shows that both the sky and the earth will obey their Lord on that day and it is only befitting for them to do so. They will show obedience out of their own free will. At another place in the Qur'ān, this obedience of the sky and earth is mentioned thus: (١١:٤١) فَقَالَ لَهَا وَلِلْأَرْضِ ائْتِيَا طَوْعًا أَوْ كَرْهًا قَالَتَا أَتَيْنَا طَائِعِينَ (He said to the sky and to the earth: "Come forward both, willingly or

3. And when the earth is stretched out and casts out all things within her and becomes empty and obeys its Lord and this is what it should do.

unwillingly.” They replied: “We are here willingly.” (41:11))

يَا أَيُّهَا الْإِنْسَانُ إِنَّكَ كَادِحٌ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ كَدْحًا فَمُلَاقِيهِ (٦)⁴

Although the address of this *sūrah* is general, however, it is specifically directed at the conceited people who were deeply engrossed in this world and oblivious of the Hereafter. Whether they are aware of it or not, they are being inexorably pulled towards their Lord and one day they will be going to face Him.

The devotees and disciples of this world, being inebriated with their worldly successes, always tend to forget their real destination. Triumph after triumph and success after success engages and absorbs them so much that they are not able to reflect on anything outside this sphere. So occupied are they in their dash to go one after another achievement that they do not even get the time to reflect on what their real destination is. They regard some accomplishment of this world to be their final destination whereas the final destination is the Hereafter. Bound by the law of God, everyone is very helplessly moving towards it. If this aspect of life had also caught their attention, they would never have deviated from the right path; they would have in fact clearly seen that they are progressing towards accountability with a speed much greater than the one with which they are moving to their coveted worldly goals,

The word كَدَحَ means “to make an effort in something with full great labour.” It very subtly conveys the fact that from the very day a person is born he starts his journey to his final destination set by God: death. This journey continues without any break. Whether the climate is harsh or easy, whether a person is sick or healthy and whether the circumstances are tough or smooth, this journey continues inexorably. Various phases from birth to death like childhood, youth, middle age and old age are encountered but this cycle never stops for a second. So tightly is man in the grip of the law of providence that even if he does not want to traverse this terrain he cannot resist it. The rich and the poor, the noble and the lowly, the ruler and the ruled and the pious and the impious are equally helpless before it.

The word فَمُلَاقِيهِ refers to the purpose of this journey. Man will not be allowed to go unaccountable in this world; hence it is essential that all people move inexorably to meet their Lord. The purpose of this meeting is obviously to hold them accountable for their deeds, which was the very objective for which this world had been created. Consequently, the

4. O Man! You also are being dragged relentlessly towards your Lord and are going to meet Him.

succeeding verses bring up the details.

فَأَمَّا مَنْ أُوتِيَ كِتَابَهُ بِيَمِينِهِ (٧) فَسَوْفَ يُحَاسِبُ حِسَابًا يَسِيرًا (٨)⁵

These verses elaborate on what is discussed earlier. The implication is that handing over their account to them in their right hand would be guarantee enough for making them entitled to salvation. Their good deeds outnumber their evil ones and they are worthy of forgiveness. It is evident from this that they too should be called to account; however, their good deeds will carry more weight and therefore their minor blemishes will be ignored. On the other hand, those whose evil deeds will carry more weight will be held accountable for each and every deed of theirs and will have to bear their punishment.

وَيَنْقَلِبُ إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهِ مَسْرُورًا (٩)⁶

This verse comprehensively states their reward. There are a number of self-obvious things which are encompassed in this style:

-- The Almighty will unite them in Paradise with the believers among their families even though these family members may not deserve the high status these people had become worthy of. This will be done so that all members of the family are able to enjoy the pleasures of Paradise by living at the same place. It has already been explained in the twenty first verse of Sūrah Tūr that for this union the Almighty will not lessen their status; He will in fact upgrade the status of their family.

-- Such people had not spent their lives with their family while remaining indifferent to their fate in the Hereafter; they always were more concerned about that their family achieving success in the Hereafter than in this world. In the previous *sūrah*, the attitude of people who were indifferent to the Hereafter is depicted by saying that when they would be with their family, they would be very happy and would contend that these blessings of life will always remain with them. The words are: (٣١:٨٣) وَإِذَا انْقَلَبُوا إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهِمْ انْقَلَبُوا فَكِهِينَ (When they return to their own folk they return rejoicing, (83:31)). On the other hand, when people who believed in the Hereafter would be happy at being united with their family are stated in the following verse of Sūrah Tūr to express these sentiments : قَالُوا إِنَّا كُنَّا قَبْلُ فِي أَهْلِنَا مُشْفِقِينَ فَمَنَّ اللَّهُ عَلَيْنَا وَوَقَانَا (٢٦-٢٧) عَذَابَ السَّمُومِ (They will say: "We were fearful of [the fate of] our family. So God has been gracious to us; He has preserved us from

5. Then he whose record is given to him in his right hand will receive an easy reckoning.

6. And he will go back to his people rejoicing.

the fiery scourge, (52:26-27)).

-- The real requirement of the love a person has for his family is that he should be concerned for their well-being in the Hereafter and also make them show concern on this issue. It is this concern which will afford him the real bliss of being united to them and of their love. If he loved his family such that both remained indifferent to the Hereafter, then this love will ultimately doom both of them and instead of rejoicing in the Hereafter both will curse one another.

وَأَمَّا مَنْ أُوتِيَ كِتَابَهُ وَرَاءَ ظَهْرِهِ (١٠)⁷

This verse depicts the fate of the people who led their lives while being indifferent to the Hereafter. Their account will be handed to them in their left hands from behind their backs. Although there is no mention of the fact that their account will be handed over to them in their left hands, yet there is a strong contextual indication to this. It is mentioned earlier that the first group will be handed over their accounts in their right hands so that the good fortune which will befall them is evident from this.⁸ Moreover, in Sūrah Hāqqah, it is explicitly mentioned that their account will be handed over to them in their left hands: وَأَمَّا مَنْ أُوتِيَ كِتَابَهُ بِشِمَالِهِ (And he who is given his record in his left hand would say: “Would that I had not been given my record. (69:25))

If this verse is understood in the light of Sūrah Hāqqah, then it becomes evident that this group will face two humiliations at the same time. Firstly, their record will be handed over to them in their left hands. Secondly, instead of being given this record from in front, they will be handed it over from their backs. Further deliberation shows that like criminals their hands will be tied behind their backs.

فَسَوْفَ يَدْعُو ثُبُورًا (١١) وَيَصْلَى سَعِيرًا (١٢) إِنَّهُ كَانَ فِي أَهْلِهِ مَسْرُورًا (١٣)⁹

Earlier on it is mentioned that the believers will happily return to their kinfolk. In exact contrast, it is now mentioned that the other group will call for their own death and destruction. The implication is that when they enter Hell, the only option they will see before them to evade its torment will be that death should destroy them. Alas! death too would not be there to alleviate their misery.

7. As for he whose record is handed out to him from behind his back.

8. There seems to be a mistake by the author wherein he has mentioned the people of the left hand instead of those of the right hand.

9. He will call for death and shall enter Hell. He remained engrossed among his kinfolk.

Now, the sequence of verses should have been such that the words يَدْعُو (he will call for death) should have come after يَصْلَى سَعِيرًا (he shall enter the blazing fire of Hell); however, to make the discourse more forceful, the effect has been placed before the cause so that the good fortune of the first group and the misfortune of the second be mentioned in exact contrast.

The verse depicts that this group will be deprived of the delight of being united with their kinfolk because whatever pleasure they could derive from them they already did in the previous world. When in the previous world they were neither concerned for their own fate nor that of their kinfolk, how can they be entitled in the Hereafter to enjoy their company. It is essential that a person has made the requisite sacrifice if he is to benefit from any favour in the Hereafter.

إِنَّهُ ظَنَّ أَنْ لَنْ يَحْجُورَ (١٤)¹⁰

The implication is that they thought that after their death they would not be raised to life again nor return to anyone. When this was so, why should they have ruined the bliss of their worldly life. Whatever pleasure they could derive from worldly resources, they did; they neither were concerned of their fate in the Hereafter nor will they receive any share when they rise there.

بَلَىٰ إِنَّ رَبَّهُ كَانَ بِهِ بَصِيرًا (١٥)¹¹

This is an immediate comment of rejection on their notion expressed above. The fact of the matter is that their Lord is watching over them; when this is a fact, then how is it even thinkable that He will not call them to His presence? This would have been against His power, wisdom, justice and mercy. At various places in the Qur'ān, this watching over by the Almighty of his creatures has been presented as an argument in favour of the Day of Judgement.

فَلَا أُفْسِمُ بِالشَّفَقِ (١٦) وَاللَّيْلِ وَمَا وَسَقَ (١٧) وَالْقَمَرِ إِذَا اتَّسَقَ (١٨) لَتَرْكَبُنَّ طَبَقًا عَن طَبَقٍ (١٩)¹²

Here, at the end, three things mentioned in the form of oaths are

10. He thought that he would never have to return.

11. Yes, why not? His Lord was fully watching over him.

12. Therefore, this is not so. I swear as witness the glow of the sunset, and the night and the objects it envelops, and the moon when it grows full that you shall certainly ascend gradually.

presented as evidence to substantiate the premise mentioned earlier in verse six: “O man! You also are being dragged relentlessly towards your Lord and are going to meet Him.” The *muqsam* ‘*alayh* of these oaths is verse nineteen: you shall certainly ascend gradually. This, in other words, means that it is certain for every person to meet his Lord; however, this will be done gradually. The reason for this is that in this universe, it is the unalterable practice of God that everything here reaches its culmination in a gradual manner.

While keeping in view this summary, let us analyze the individual parts of the discourse.

In the verse فَلَا أُقْسِمُ بِالشَّفَقِ لَا the particle of negation لَا is mentioned in much the same way as it is in the first verse of Sūrah Qiyāmah (٧٥: ١) لَا أُقْسِمُ بِيَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ as well as in many other oaths. I have explained many a time that this particle is neither superfluous nor is it meant to refute the oath; it is in fact meant to refute in advance a false claim of the addressees which is intended to be negated by the oath itself. The efficacy in this style is that the speaker does not even wait to refute the false claim of his addressees by first presenting an argument and then refuting it; he, on the contrary, begins his speech with a refutation. This is a very natural style and is found in all well-known languages of the world.

First an oath is sworn by the glow of the sunset and then by the night and what it envelops. It is this reddish glow which becomes a prelude to the night. As long as it stays, evening remains. It then gradually fades away and night envelops the world.

In the expression وَمَا وَسَقَ (and the objects it envelops), an oath is sworn by things which the night envelops. Lexicographers explain it by saying: مَا جَمَعَ ie things which the night gathers in it.¹³ Generally, our exegetes have regarded this to refer to animals because they take refuge in the night for taking rest; some others have regarded it to refer to rivers, mountains and trees since the night enshrouds them. The question arises however of the relationship of these things with the *muqsam* ‘*alayh* because oaths are sworn to substantiate what is mentioned as the *muqsam* ‘*alayh*. For this reason, to me this refers to the stars which appear at night and which embellish the night. Firstly, stars are specifically related to nightfall and as such the expression وَمَا وَسَقَ is a very apt description of them. Secondly, the Qur’ān, at various places, has presented their appearing and setting, coming and going, kneeling and prostrating to bear evidence to the fact that they are in subjugation to the Almighty: they appear at His behest, then they gradually rise on a prescribed path and then gradually start to disappear until they turn towards their Creator. It was at

13. Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-‘arab*, vol. 10, 380.

the command of this Creator that they appear. In other words, in them is a clear evidence of the tremendous grasp of the law of God mentioned in the verse: إِنَّكَ كَادِحٌ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ كَدْحًا (O Man! You also are being dragged relentlessly towards your Lord and are going).

The verse وَالْقَمَرَ إِذَا اكْتَسَقَ (and the moon when it grows full) is a mention of the specific after the general. The words وَمَا وَسَقَ encompass the stars and all heavenly bodies whether moving or stationary. Here, in this verse, one specific heavenly body – the moon is selected as their outstanding representative and its waxing and waning is emphatically presented for a certain reason. As per this reason, no other thing highlights what is stated in verses six and nineteen¹⁴ to the extent the moon does. Consequently, in Sūrah Yāsīn, the Qur'ān has specifically underscored this aspect of the moon thus: وَالْقَمَرَ قَدَرْنَاهُ مَنَازِلَ حَتَّىٰ عَادَ كَالْعُرْجُونِ الْقَدِيمِ (36:39) (We have ordained phases for the moon, passing through which it ultimately appears like a withered twig of a date-palm. (36:39))

The expression means إِذَا اكْتَسَقَ when the moon grows into a full moon. Attention is focused on its gradual progress; it does not dare deviate from its prescribed cycle and once it reaches its zenith, it does not have the authority to remain there. It has to once again gradually begin its downward journey and it cannot escape doing so.

The expression لَتَرْكَبُنَّ طَبَقًا عَنْ طَبَقٍ (you shall certainly ascend gradually) is the *muqṣam* 'alayh of these oaths. The implication is that just as all these things are governed by a divine law and travelling towards God, and similarly man too after passing through various phases is moving inescapably towards the Almighty. It is neither possible that he remains where he is nor possible that he goes to some other destination. His journey may be gradual – a practice of God found in all phenomena of nature – but he is sure to reach this destination. It is thus only befitting for him to not make haste nor deny the Hereafter on the basis that he was not given a glimpse of it at his demand.

فَمَا لَهُمْ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ (٢٠)¹⁵

This is an expression of wonder at their state: They must have really lost their senses if after all these blatant signs they are not professing faith in the Hereafter and reward and punishment.

14. Verse six reads: يَا أَيُّهَا الْإِنْسَانُ إِنَّكَ كَادِحٌ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ كَدْحًا فَمُلَاقِيهِ (O Man! You also are being dragged relentlessly towards your Lord and are going). Verse nineteen reads: لَتَرْكَبُنَّ طَبَقًا عَنْ طَبَقٍ (you shall certainly ascend gradually).

15. So what has come over them that they are not professing faith?

وَإِذَا قُرِئَ عَلَيْهِمُ الْقُرْآنُ لَا يَسْجُدُونَ (٢١)¹⁶

The implication of this verse is that when the Qur'ān is informing them of this great fact, it was only befitting for them to have fallen down in prostration before the Almighty whenever it would be recited to them. This would have reflected their gratitude of acknowledging the greatness of the Qur'ān and of the great news it was giving them; on the contrary, their attitude is the direct opposite: they are arrogantly denying it.

Here worth considering the fact is a tradition of the Arabs and the Egyptians: when they wanted to acknowledge the greatness and veracity of someone's discourse, they would bow down in prostration as soon as they would observe it or listen to it. The magicians whom the Pharaoh had gathered to contest Moses (sws) had acknowledged the veracity of his message and the grandness of his miracles in a similar manner. Famous contemporary poets of the Prophet's times in Arabia while acknowledging a couplet of the eminent Arab poet Labīd bowed down in prostration before him and it was on this basis that his poetical composition was hung in the Baytullāh and that he came to be regarded as the "king of poets" of those times. Obviously, the Qur'ān is way ahead in its veracity and literary efficacy than all these things; however, people who were unaware of its value and worth, instead of prostrating before it, showed arrogance and made fun of it.

بَلِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا يُكَذِّبُونَ (٢٢)¹⁷

This is a portrayal of the practical state of affairs: the disbelievers were rejecting the Qur'ān what to speak of prostrating before it. They contending that it has been fabricated by the person who is presenting it and he in fact wants to overawe them by intimidating them about the Hereafter.

وَاللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا يُوعُونَ (٢٣)¹⁸

The implication is that the Almighty knows fully well the pebbles they are accumulating after rejecting this pearl. The immediate gains of this world have led them to this attitude; alas! the reality of whatever they are accumulating is not known to them; only the Almighty is aware of it. It is only on the day when what they have accumulated will come before

16. And when the Qur'ān is recited before them they do not fall down in prostration!

17. In fact those who have disbelieved are denying!

18. And Allah knows full well what they are accumulating.

them that they will realize what they threw away and what they gathered. The generality found in the words بِمَا يُوعُونَ includes the wealth they have gathered as well as their deeds and the consequences of these deeds which will necessarily come before them; however, their real awareness will come to them in the Hereafter and not in this world.

فَبَشِّرْهُمْ بِعَذَابٍ أَلِيمٍ (٢٤) إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَهُمْ أَجْرٌ غَيْرُ مَمْنُونٍ (٢٥)¹⁹

The implication is that if these people, being caught in love of this world, do not have the courage to adopt the path prescribed to them by the Qur'ān, then the Prophet (sws) should give them glad tidings of a painful doom – a fate they deserve because of their misdeeds.

In other words, if they are not ready to hear the good news of salvation, then the Prophet (sws) should announce to them the good news of torment. Only those people will be saved from this torment who profess faith and do righteous deeds – the very message towards which the Qur'ān is calling them. For such people indeed, there shall be eternal reward.

With the grace of God, this brings us to the end of this *sūrah's tafsīr*. السعي مني والإتمام من الله وبيده الفضل كله وهو على كل شيء قدير (I can only strive [for a task] and it is up to the Almighty to bring [it] to completion and all blessings are in His hands and He has power over all things.

Rahmānabad

10th September 1979 AD

17th Shawwāl 1399 AH

19. So give them glad tidings of a painful torment. For those, however, who accepted faith and did righteous deeds there is eternal reward.

Sūrah Burūj

Period of Revelation and Subject Matter

This *sūrah* was revealed at the time when the disbelievers of the Quraysh began persecuting people who were embracing Islam. They were angry at people giving up their ancestral religion and accepting a new one. In this *sūrah*, the Quraysh are warned that if they do not give up their persecution and oppression they will soon be seized by the Almighty and will never be released from His grasp. Simultaneously, the oppressed Muslims are assured that they should not get intimidated by this wave of coercion and tyranny let loose by the Quraysh; they should remain steadfast on this new religion. However tough the circumstances may be, they should remember that the God in whom they have professed faith is all-powerful and no one can stop Him from implementing His will. At the end, the disbelievers are warned that they should not regard this Qur'ān which is informing them of this danger to be something of the nature of magic and sorcery or poetry and soothsaying; it is, in fact, revealed by the Almighty and its origin is the guarded tablet (*lawḥ-i mahfūz*). Each and every word of it will come true.

Analysis of the Discourse

Following is the sequence of the discourse of the *sūrah*:

Verses (1-4): Oaths are sworn by the sky consisting of forts and by the Day of Judgement that the Day of Judgement is bound to come and there is eternal doom for people who will be thrown in the pits of Hell.

Verses (5-11): Believers who were oppressed because they had professed faith in the God of the heavens and earth are promised help and given glad tidings of Paradise on the condition that they remain steadfast on their faith. At the same time, people who have oppressed these Muslims are threatened with torment. They are the ones who were not even moved to repent from these acts of coercion.

Verses (12-16): A mention in the light of God's attributes of majesty and grandeur of the all-embracing nature of His punishment and of the extent of His mercy and forgiveness for those who repent from this crime.

Verses (17-18): A reference to the tyranny and oppression of some nations of the past who had persecuted believers in the way similar to

what the Quraysh were doing now and because of which they were punished by the Almighty.

Verses (19-22): Sorrow is expressed at the misfortune of the Quraysh as per which they were persisting to deny the warnings of the Qur'ān and were inebriated with the lust for power; whereas these warnings are a reality and there is no escape for them. They are not beyond God's control. He has surrounded them from all sides. The Qur'ān is not of the genre of poetry and soothsaying as they allege. It is a very noble and majestic discourse revealed by the Almighty and it originates from the guarded tablet.

Text and Translation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَالسَّمَاءِ ذَاتِ الْبُرُوجِ (١) وَالْيَوْمِ الْمَوْعُودِ (٢) وَشَahِدِ وَمَشْهُودِ (٣) قُتِلَ أَصْحَابُ الْأُخْدُودِ (٤) النَّارِ ذَاتِ الْوُفُودِ (٥) إِذْ هُمْ عَلَيْهَا قُعُودٌ (٦) وَهُمْ عَلَى مَا يَفْعَلُونَ بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ شُهُودٌ (٧) وَمَا نَقَمُوا مِنْهُمْ إِلَّا أَنْ يُؤْمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ الْعَزِيزِ الْحَمِيدِ (٨) الَّذِي لَهُ مُلْكُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاللَّهُ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ (٩) إِنَّ الَّذِينَ فَتَنُوا الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَتُوبُوا فَلَهُمْ عَذَابُ جَهَنَّمَ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابُ الْحَرِيقِ (١٠) إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَهُمْ جَنَّاتٌ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ ذَلِكَ الْفَوْزُ الْكَبِيرُ (١١) إِنَّ بَطْشَ رَبِّكَ لَشَدِيدٌ (١٢) إِنَّهُ هُوَ يُبْدِئُ وَيُعِيدُ (١٣) وَهُوَ الْغَفُورُ الْوَدُودُ (١٤) ذُو الْعَرْشِ الْمَجِيدُ (١٥) فَعَالٌ لِمَا يُرِيدُ (١٦) هَلْ أَتَاكَ حَدِيثُ الْجُنُودِ (١٧) فِرْعَوْنُ وَثَمُودَ (١٨) بَلْ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فِي تَكْذِيبٍ (١٩) وَاللَّهُ مِنْ وَرَائِهِمْ مُحِيطٌ (٢٠) بَلْ هُوَ قُرْآنٌ مَجِيدٌ (٢١) فِي لَوْحٍ مَحْفُوظٍ (٢٢)

In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Ever Merciful.

By the sky consisting of forts and the promised day and one who sees and that what is seen. Doomed are the companions of the ditch of the fuelled-fire when they will be sitting on it and will see what they had been doing with the believers. (1-7)

And they merely expressed their wrath on them because they professed faith in God, the Mighty, the Praiseworthy, to whom only belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, and God is watching every thing. (8-9)

For those who persecuted believing men and believing women and did not repent is surely the punishment of Hell and the torment of burning. However, those who strongly embraced faith and did righteous deeds, for

them are the gardens in which rivers flow. This, in fact, is great success. (10-11)

Indeed severe is the grip of your Lord. He alone begins and He alone will bring back. And He is all-Forgiving and all-Loving, Lord of the throne, the glorious,¹ doer of whatever He desires. (12-16)

Has the story of the forces reached you? Of the forces of the Pharaoh and the Thamūd? But these disbelievers will continue to deny. And God is surrounding them from all sides. [This is not something to be denied]. In fact, this is an exalted discourse. It is in a preserved tablet. (17-22)

Explanation

وَالسَّمَاءِ ذَاتِ الْبُرُوجِ²(١)

The word بُرُج means forts and castles. It is used in this meaning both in Arabic and in the Qur'ān. Wherever it is used as an adjective qualifying the heavens, it refers to the forts and observation posts in which angels of God are always stationed to stop the devils from crossing a certain boundary – the *malā' a'lā* – in the divine kingdom. If they dare try to cross this boundary, then shooting stars are pelted at them, as is mentioned in various other *sūrahs* of the Qur'ān. It is not possible for anyone from the jinn folk or the men folk to enter the limits of the *malā' a'lā* or eavesdrop in divine matters.

The oaths sworn here are meant to bear evidence to a premise which is mentioned further ahead. The addressees of this *sūrah* are the arrogant leaders of the Quraysh of Makkah and Tā'if, as is indicated in the introduction of the *sūrah* earlier. These leaders, being inebriated with the lust for power, were persecuting weak Muslims and arrogantly regarded their own forts and castles to be unconquerable. They never even thought that the all-powerful God upon whose frail servants they have let loose this wave of tyranny is not weak and helpless. In fact, He is the creator and the master of the sky consisting of fortresses. He is not unconcerned about the affairs of the world; in fact, His angels are continuously guarding every nook and corner of this world from the fortresses in which they are stationed. Whenever He desires, He can destroy all the castles, pavilions and edifices of these people and bring down their pride and conceit to ashes.

1. There has been an obvious mistake in the translation of verse fifteen by the author, which I have corrected here. He has translated the verse by regarding the adjective الْمَجِيدُ to qualify the noun الْعَرْشِ which of course is not the case since the former is declined in the nominative and the latter in the genitive. (Translator)

2. By the sky consisting of forts.

وَالْيَوْمِ الْمَوْعُودِ³

Here in this verse, an oath is sworn by the Day of Judgement whose advent has been promised by the Almighty. It is sworn by here, just as it is in Sūrah Qiyāmah. Swearing by the Day of Judgement which is meant to frighten people of it alludes to the fact that no sane person can deny it. Thus it is said in Sūrah Qiyāmah that its testimony is present in man's soul itself; no external evidence is required for it: *بَلِّ الْإِنْسَانُ عَلَى نَفْسِهِ بَصِيرَةً* (in fact, he himself is a witness upon his own self, however much he may put up excuses, (75:14-15).

وَشَٰهِدٍ وَمَشْهُودٍ⁴

Both nouns are undefined so that they can connote generality. All the testimonies and evidences of the Day of Judgement are thereby alluded to which are found in every nook and corner of the world on the condition that a person possesses keen eyes and a discerning heart. Thus, for example:

-- Every object of this world, big or small, bears evidence to the power, wisdom, mercy, providence and other superior attributes of the Almighty. The obvious consequence of these attributes, as is explained by the Qur'ān, is that this world should not just continue the way it is nor end accidentally; in fact, it is essential that a day come in which the Almighty discriminate between the pious and the impious. This is the day when those who spent their lives according to the will of the Almighty will receive reward and others who have spent their lives without having any sense of accountability will be punished. If this does not happen, then this would mean that the Creator of this world regards good and evil to be equivalent.

-- The Qur'ān has narrated at many places the accounts of the messengers and their struggle against their people and also the consequence of this struggle. It has described how the Almighty destroyed the people who denied His messengers even though these people possessed great power and glory. It has urged man to learn a lesson from the signs and remnants of such people. These remnants have been preserved by the Almighty for the very reason that others should learn a lesson from them: the Almighty will deal with them in the same manner as He dealt with these people if they too followed in their footsteps and became arrogant.

3. And the promised day.

4. And one who sees and that what is seen.

Together with this argumentative nature of the words *شَاهِدٍ* and *مَشْهُودٍ* there is also an element of intimidation hidden in them. This will manifest itself on the Day of Judgement. By this element of intimidation, reference is to the fact that no one should remain in the misconception that whatever he is doing in this world is not known to the Almighty in any way; in fact, whatever he does will come before him one by one and he will see everything with his own eyes. His limbs themselves will bear witness to all his words and deeds. Noble scribes as angels deputed by God will present a report of all his good and bad deeds. The prophets of God, the righteous and the reformers too will bear witness to what they taught their people and how they reacted to their message.

قُتِلَ أَصْحَابُ الْأُخْدُودِ (٤) النَّارِ ذَاتِ الْوُفُودِ (٥)⁵

These verses do not represent the complement of oath (*muqsam 'alayh*) ie. the premise on which evidence is presented through an oath. An ellipsis of the complement of oath has occurred here just as it has occurred in Sūrah Qāf and some other *sūrahs*. It is replaced with verses which remind and admonish those who were rejecting the Day of Judgement. This style is adopted at places where the complement of oath is so obvious that a person's mind comprehends it even if it is not mentioned. This creates brevity in the discourse as the whole complement of oath can be regarded to have been suppressed since the context strongly occasions it. Here if the complement of oath is unveiled in the light of the oaths sworn, it would be something to the effect: The Day of Judgement is certain to come; nothing is beyond the control of the Almighty; on that day, everyone will witness the results of their deeds.

The word *الْأُخْدُودِ* means “a pit” or “a ditch” or “a cavity”. It is qualified by the words *النَّارِ ذَاتِ الْوُفُودِ* which means that this pit will be filled with fuelled-fire. The words “fuelled-fire” intend to convey the fact that the Almighty has made available ample fuel in order to make this fire burn continuously. No one should think that this fire will dwindle once its fuel starts to diminish. In Sūrah Baqarah, this fuel is explained by the words: *فَاتَّقُوا النَّارَ الَّتِي وَقُودُهَا النَّاسُ وَالْحِجَارَةُ (٢: ٢٤)* (then fear the Fire whose fuel is these men and these stones, (2:24)).

While explaining the words *أَصْحَابُ الْأُخْدُودِ* (companions of the ditch), our exegetes have recorded the account of a king without mentioning his name and period. They have only recorded that he cast many believing Christians into ditches of fire because they had refused to prostrate before him. Even though history has recorded some incidents of burning of

5. Doomed are the companions of the ditch of the fuelled-fire.

people at the stake in the times when various Christian sects were at daggers drawn with each other, however the strange things written by our exegetes in the explanation of this incident in particular are not acceptable in any way; I would just tend to ignore what they have written. Here the addressees are the leaders of the Quraysh, as is indicated earlier. They were persecuting and oppressing weak Muslims. How could they have learnt a lesson from the fate of a king whose identity was unknown to them; the exegetes too have no knowledge of it. Moreover, this also needs our consideration that the threatened punishment mentioned here in these verses relates to the Hereafter and not to this world. If this threat is regarded to relate to this world, then though this would certainly portray to a small extent the oppressions they committed but the Qur'ān has not mentioned any exemplary fate they would meet in this world that would induce the Quraysh to learn a lesson from it. The fact that the fire initiated by them reduced them and their settlements to ashes is something which only our exegetes have mentioned. The Qur'ān has not alluded to it in any way even though it was the real thing that needed to be mentioned for the purpose under consideration.

In my opinion, these verses actually threaten the arrogant leaders of the Quraysh who had let loose a wave of persecution over Muslims and were harming them in various ways. They are warned that if they did not desist from this tyranny and oppression, they will be thrown in that ditch of Hell which will be fuelled by fire that will never die down.

إِذْ هُمْ عَلَيْهَا قُعُودٌ (٦) وَهُمْ عَلَىٰ مَا يَفْعَلُونَ بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ شُهُودٌ (٧)⁶

These verses depict the fate of this tyrannical lot. The implication is that first they will be made to sit at the edge of the fire-filled ditch so that they are able to see their future abode and then they will taste punishment of each of their evil deeds. In other words, the word شُهُودٌ denotes the outcome of the verb contained in it. Several examples of this style are found in the Qur'ān.

Here it should be kept in consideration that if a criminal is shown his abode before he is consigned to it, his agony is doubled. The Qur'ān has alluded at many places that criminals shall first be made to sit at the edges of the pit of Hell so that they are able to see where they will be going and then they shall be cast into it. It is mentioned in the Qur'ān that the Pharaoh and his people will be made to see Hell numerous times when they would be residing in the world of Barzakh.

6. When they will be sitting on it and will see what they had been doing with the believers.

It is possible that a question arise here in the mind of someone: The particle *إِذْ* is used to remind someone of an incident that has occurred in the past while I have taken it as portraying a future incident. The answer to this question is that at many places in the Qur'ān incidents that will take place on the Day of Judgement are mentioned in the past tense. This style is explained by scholars as future incidents being mentioned in the past tense to denote their certainty. I have explained this style at a number of places in this *tafsīr*.

وَمَا نَقَمُوا مِنْهُمْ إِلَّا أَنْ يُؤْمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ الْعَزِيزِ الْحَمِيدِ (٨)⁷

The implication of this verse is that this wrath was not let loose on Muslims because they were guilty of some offence; on the contrary, their greatest virtue became their greatest crime in the eyes of these oppressors, as a result of which they were punished. Their only crime was that they believed in God, the Mighty, the Praiseworthy. The truth of the matter is that by professing faith in the Almighty these people have fulfilled their greatest obligation towards Him. Fulfilling this obligation is something very commendable and noble and not worthy of revenge. However, people who have lost their senses behave in this very manner with their well-wishers.

From among the attributes of God, two are mentioned: *الْعَزِيزُ* and *الْحَمِيدُ*. The former depicts His power, honour and majesty while the latter His mercy, providence and being worthy of praise and gratitude. The purpose of mentioning them is that only the being Who has such attributes is worthy of being professed faith in. Those who have professed faith in Him have relied on the support of someone whose support is the real support and it is only they who will succeed. The glad tidings for oppressed Muslims and the threat for those disbelievers who were harassing them found in between the lines of these verses does not require any explanation.

الَّذِي لَهُ مُلْكُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاللَّهُ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ (٩)⁸

Here in this verse, further light is cast on the glad tidings and threat referred to in the previous verse. The implication is that only He is worthy of being professed faith in to whom belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth and His refuge is sufficient for people who

7. And they merely expressed their wrath on them because they professed faith in God, the Mighty, the Praiseworthy.

8. To whom only belongs the kingdom of the Heavens and the earth, and God is watching every thing.

professed faith in Him.

The expression *وَاللَّهُ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ* directs Muslims who are being harassed by the enemies of faith to rest assured that the Being to Whom belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth is not unaware of this cruelty and when this is so how long will He put up with the cruelty being meted out to His people in His own kingdom. Simultaneously, the disbelievers are warned that they should not become conceited because of the respite granted to them by the Almighty. The Almighty is not unaware of their oppression; He is observing all what they are doing. It would not be long before He will avenge the brutality faced by His weak servants and powerful will be this revenge.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ فَتَنُوا الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَتُوبُوا فَلَهُمْ عَذَابُ جَهَنَّمَ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابُ الْحَرِيقِ (١٠)⁹

The threat found in between lines in the previous verses is expressed blatantly here. The word *فِتْنَةٌ* specifically denotes the oppression meted out to people to force them to give up their religion. It is used in this meaning at a number of places in the Qur'ān and this has been explained earlier.

Believing women are specially mentioned besides believing men because the times of trial to which these verses relate were the ones in which women, in particular slave-women, being the weaker sections of the society, were severely oppressed. These oppressors and tyrants are informed that if they want to live securely, they should repent and reform themselves as soon as possible. For they should remember that if they die in this state, they will go straight to Hell.

After a mention of *عَذَابُ جَهَنَّمَ* (punishment of Hell), a mention of *عَذَابُ الْحَرِيقِ* (torment of burning) was apparently not needed. However, this mention is that of the specific after the general. Hell is the place of all forms of torments; the greatest of these is the torment of burning. In other words, these people are warned that besides other forms of torment they will also have to bear the torment of burning and hence they must thoroughly contemplate their fate.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَهُمْ جَنَّاتٌ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ ذَلِكَ الْفَوْزُ الْكَبِيرُ (١١)¹⁰

This verse encourages the believers who remained steadfast on their faith even in very trying circumstances. As per contextual indication, the verb *آمَنُوا* is used in its complete sense. The implication is that if in spite of

9. For those who persecuted believing men and believing women and did not repent is surely the punishment of Hell and the torment of burning.

10. However, those who strongly embraced faith and did righteous deeds, for them are the gardens in which rivers flow. This, in fact, is great success.

the oppression of these tyrants, the believers who remain steadfast on their faith and do righteous deeds will indeed be rewarded with gardens beneath which rivers flow.

The sentence **ذَلِكَ الْفَوْزُ الْكَبِيرُ** (this, in fact, is great success) refers to the fact that this success should not be deemed ordinary: it is eternal and everlasting; only he who attains it will come to know how great a kingdom he was blessed with in return for a few days of trial.

¹¹ **إِنَّ بَطْشَ رَبِّكَ لَشَدِيدٌ (١٢)**

The warnings which have been sounded in the previous verses to the disbelievers who were persecuting the believers and the glad tidings which have been given to the oppressed Muslims are further emphasized and substantiated here by the Almighty through reminding them of some of His attributes.

So strong is the grip of God that no one should be in the misconception that he will be able to save himself from Him through his clan, supporters or deities. No one can save himself from God's grip nor can anyone else be of any help to him in this matter.

If the address found in the word **رَبِّكَ** (your Lord) is related to the Prophet (sws), then this would be in his capacity of a representative and advocate of the Muslims.

¹² **إِنَّهُ هُوَ يُبْدِئُ وَيُعِيدُ (١٣)**

The punishment of Hell with which the oppressors were threatened in the previous verses is substantiated here: no one should remain in the misconception that the threat of the Hereafter is fake and that there is no life or death after one dies. It is the Almighty only Who creates people and when He does so He is also able to re-create them. When He faced no difficulty in creating them the first time, why should He face difficulty in re-creating them?

¹³ **وَهُوَ الْغَفُورُ الْودُودُ (١٤) ذُو الْعَرْشِ الْمَجِيدُ (١٥) فَعَالٌ لِّمَا يُرِيدُ (١٦)**

Since only He is all-forgiving and all-loving, if people want to be emotionally attached to someone, then they should attach themselves to Him. No one else can be of any help to people. He is the Lord of the

11. Indeed, severe is the grip of your Lord.

12. He alone begins and He alone will bring back.

13. And He is all-Forgiving and all-Loving, Lord of the throne, the glorious, doer of whatever He desires.

throne and He is the glorious. No one shares His kingdom and sovereignty. He is dependent on no one and neither can anyone hinder His plans.

هَلْ أَتَاكَ حَدِيثُ الْجُنُودِ (١٧) فِرْعَوْنَ وَثَمُودَ (١٨)¹⁴

In order to substantiate the facts mentioned above, certain examples from history are cited. Amongst the tales of nations mentioned in the Qur'ān who were seized by the Almighty the wave of tyranny let loose by the Thamūd and the Pharaoh is specially mentioned here. The leaders of the Quraysh were overawed by the power and glory of these nations. The Quraysh are urged to seek a lesson from their fate: they were destroyed in the wink of an eye and no one was able to save them.

بَلِّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فِي تَكْذِيبِ (١٩)¹⁵

A portion of the discourse is suppressed before the word بَلِّ because of contextual indications. If we try to unveil it, the whole discourse would be something like this: Whatever they are being read out is the truth word for word. No one can possibly deny it; however, these rejecters of the Day of Judgement after denying it deliberately have become so stubborn that they are not ready to accept it.

وَاللَّهُ مِنْ وَرَائِهِمْ مُحِيطٌ (٢٠)¹⁶

The word وَرَاءَ means both “front” and “back”. The implication is that if they are adamant in their denial, then let them be so; however, they should remember that their denial cannot negate the reality. The Almighty is surrounding them from all sides and they cannot run away from Him.

بَلِّ هُوَ قُرْآنٌ مَجِيدٌ (٢١) فِي لَوْحٍ مَحْفُوظٍ (٢٢)¹⁷

Before the letter بَلِّ, a certain part of the discourse is suppressed because it is considered to be understood and contextual indications point to it. If this suppressed portion is unfolded, the whole discourse would be something to the effect: The fate with which this Qur'ān is threatening them is a certain reality; it is an exalted discourse; it is not of

14. Has the story of the forces reached you? Of the forces of Pharaoh and the Thamūd?

15. [This is not something to be denied]. But these disbelievers will continue to deny.

16. And God is surrounding them from all sides.

17. In fact, this is an exalted discourse. It is in a preserved tablet.

the genre of poetry and soothsaying; it is, on the contrary, revealed by the Almighty and its origin is the guarded tablet, which is inaccessible to both jinn and men.

With the help and grace of God, the *tafsīr* of this *sūrah* stands completed. فالحمد لله على احسانه (gratitude be to God for His blessings)

Lahore,

11th October, 1979 AD

18th Dhū al-Qa‘dah, 1399 AH

Sūrah Ṭāriq

Central Theme and Relationship with the Preceding Sūrah

This *sūrah* is the counterpart of the previous one: Sūrah Burūj. Both have the same central theme. The only difference between the two is the style of the discourse and the arguments presented. If one views them with regard to their introduction and ending also, one finds amazing similarity between the two. In the light shed by the signs of the world around man and the one within him as well as the attributes of the Creator of this universe, the addressees are informed that they should not regard the day of reward and punishment of which the Qur'ān has threatened them to be a matter of jest. It is certain to come. The delay in its advent should not mislead them to deny it. The Almighty is in fact giving them respite so that they are left with no excuse to deny the truth and their end is drawing near. Compelling is the scheme of God. Thus He does not show haste in seizing the arrogant; but when He does, no one is able to free himself from His clasp.

Analysis of the Discourse

Following is the sequence adopted in the discourse:

Verses (1-4): Heavens and earth are called to witness on the fact that nothing is beyond the eyes of God. He has deputed guardians on every soul. Both men and jinn are under surveillance. He can seize anyone at anytime He wants to and punish him. No one is beyond His control.

Verses (5-8): The rejecters of the Day of Judgement are urged to reflect on the fact that the substance from which man has been created is not rare so as to be beyond God's access; on the contrary, he is made from a drop of fluid which emanates from his own body. When the Almighty has the power to fashion a drop of his fluid into a living being, how can He be powerless to re-create him.

Verses (9-10): A mention of the fact that the Almighty is fully aware of all the words and deeds and even secrets of the hearts and all hidden details. One day, all these secrets shall be examined and assessed. On that day, no person will have any of his own support and backing which can be of any help to him nor will any intercession be of any benefit to him.

Verses (11-14): A general physical phenomenon is presented to argue that the Day of Judgement with which the Qur'ān is threatening its

addressees is no matter of jest; it is, in fact, a certain reality which is bound to waylay them one day; people should try to prepare themselves for this day instead of making fun of it.

Verses (15-17): The Prophet (sws) is assured that the schemes devised by his enemies in order to reject him should not lead him to despair; he should give them some respite. The bait thrown to them by His Lord in seizing them after they gradually entangle themselves in deeper sin is bearing results. Soon they will be facing their fate.

Text and Translation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
وَالسَّمَاءِ وَالطَّارِقِ (١) وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا الطَّارِقُ (٢) النَّجْمُ الثَّاقِبُ (٣) إِنَّ كُلَّ نَفْسٍ لَمَّا
عَلَيْهَا حَافِظٌ (٤) فَلْيَنْظُرِ الْإِنْسَانُ مِمَّ خُلِقَ (٥) خُلِقَ مِنْ مَّاءٍ دَافِقٍ (٦) يَخْرُجُ مِنْ بَيْنِ
الصُّلْبِ وَالتَّرَائِبِ (٧) إِنَّهُ عَلَى رَجْعِهِ لَقَادِرٌ (٨) يَوْمَ تُبْلَى السَّرَائِرُ (٩) فَمَا لَهُ مِنْ قُوَّةٍ وَلَا
نَاصِرٍ (١٠) وَالسَّمَاءِ ذَاتِ الرَّجْعِ (١١) وَالْأَرْضِ ذَاتِ الصَّدْعِ (١٢) إِنَّهُ لَقَوْلُ فَصْلٍ (١٣) وَمَا
هُوَ بِالْهَزْلِ (١٤) إِنَّهُمْ يَكِيدُونَ كَيْدًا (١٥) وَأَكِيدُ كَيْدًا (١٦) فَمَهْلُ الْكَافِرِينَ أَمْهَلُهُمْ
رُويْدًا (١٧)

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Ever Merciful.

The sky and those which appear in the night bear witness – and what have you understood what those which appear in the night are? Glittering stars – that there is not a soul which does not have a guardian over it. (1-4)

Let man reflect on what he has been created from. He has been created from a trivial squirting fluid that comes out from between the spine and the ribs. Indeed, He is fully capable of creating him again. (5-8)

On that day, all secrets will be scrutinized. Then at that time neither will he have any power nor any helper. (9-10)

The sky when rain bursts forth from it and the earth which splits asunder bear witness that this is a decisive word. And it is no jest. (11-14)

They are conniving a plot and I am also devising a plan. So give respite to these disbelievers; leave them a while. (15-17)

Explanation

وَالسَّمَاءِ وَالطَّارِقِ (١) وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا الطَّارِقُ (٢) النَّجْمُ الثَّاقِبُ (٣)¹

Just as in the previous *sūrah*, the sky consisting of fortresses is sworn by, here in this *sūrah*, the sky and its glittering stars are sworn by. This oath, as has been explained, is meant to testify to a premise which is stated ahead.

The literal meaning of the word طَارِقُ is “one who comes in the night”; here it refers to the stars which appear in the night. The Qur’ān itself has explained this word by the expression النَّجْمُ الثَّاقِبُ (glittering stars).

The question posed by the words وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ (what have you understood?) is to direct attention to the magnificence and importance of this testimony. The implication is that no one should regard this testimony to be an ordinary one. It is indeed a potent testimony if the serious minds are able to deliberate on it and don’t make fun of it.

The expression النَّجْمُ الثَّاقِبُ (glittering stars) does not refer to some specific star. It only refers to the genre of stars which is very similar to its usage in the following verse: وَيَالِ النَّجْمِ هُمْ يَهْتَدُونَ (١٦:١٦) (and through the stars are they rightly guided, (16:16)). In some other verses also, it is used thus to connote the genre the way it is here. However, the adjective الثَّاقِبُ (glittering) signifies that only those stars are referred to here whose light reaches us of its own accord and for whose observation advanced telescopes are not required; every person can observe them through the naked eye and learn from them the lesson which the Qur’ān intends to teach here. It must be kept in consideration that the number of stars cannot be gauged by merely counting what one can see; this is just a small part of the great treasure trove. Who else than the Almighty can know the number of worlds and the number of stars.

إِنَّ كُلَّ نَفْسٍ لَّمَّا عَلَيْهَا حَافِظٌ (٤)²

This is the premise which is meant to be substantiated from the oath sworn earlier. The use of the word لَّمَّا is rather unique. For this very reason, grammarians have differed in its interpretation. I have already alluded to my research in this regard while explaining verse one hundred and eleven of Sūrah Hūd and verse thirty five of Sūrah Zukhruf.

One of the aspects of the premise to which stars bear witness viz. the Almighty has appointed guardian over every soul is that man should

1. The sky and those which appear in the night – and what have you understood what those which appear in the night are? glittering stars.

2.- that there is not a soul which does not have a guardian over it.

reflect on these divinely appointed innumerable eyes which remain awake all night and stare relentlessly at the inhabitants of the earth; no one can dare escape their gaze. The greatest of telescopes invented by science do not have the power of the most ordinary star of the firmament: the light from these stars pierces various layers of atmosphere and reaches the earth. Only a very naïve person can think that there can be things which are beyond the notice of God – the God Who is displaying such majesty of His power every night as depicted in this verse.

The second aspect is the same as referred to in the previous *sūrah* and as mentioned at other places in the Qur’ān: the Almighty has built forts and observation posts in these stars from which devils who dare to enter the prohibited territory are pelted with shooting stars. This system set up by God bears testimony to the fact that this world is not an un-minded lot. At every nook and corner of this universe, He has deputed sentinels who guard everything day and night; hence it is obvious that a Day of accountability is bound to come and no one would be able to escape this accountability.

فَلْيَنْظُرِ الْإِنْسَانُ مِمَّ خُلِقَ (٥) خُلِقَ مِنْ مَّاءٍ دَافِقٍ (٦) يَخْرُجُ مِنْ بَيْنِ الصُّلْبِ وَالتَّرَائِبِ (٧) إِنَّهُ عَلَى رَجْعِهِ لَقَادِرٌ (٨)³

In these verses, attention is focused on the sense of responsibility which should arise in a person who has grasped the reality that this world is not unattended; its Creator is watching over each and every thing; when He is doing so, then it is essential that He bring about a day when virtuous deeds and the consequences which correspond to them are brought before the virtuous and evil deeds, and the consequences which correspond to them are brought before the evil.

In the words فَلْيَنْظُرِ الْإِنْسَانُ man’s attention is directed at his own being: if he merely reflects on it, he will find such majestic manifestations of God’s power, wisdom and creativity that he will cry out that the Almighty Who can create him with such great abilities from such an insignificant drop of fluid is fully capable of creating him again after death.

The greatest doubt raised by the rejecters of the Day of Judgement was that they regarded being re-created after death to be an impossibility. In order to dispel this doubt, the Qur’ān has asked them at various places to just reflect on their existence. In Sūrah ‘Abas, such people are chided in

3. Let man reflect on what he has been created from. He has been created from a trivial squirting fluid that comes out from between the spine and the ribs. Indeed, He is fully capable of creating him again.

the following words:

فُتِلَ الْإِنْسَانُ مَا أَكْفَرَهُ مِنْ أَيِّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقَهُ مِنْ نُّطْفَةٍ خَلَقَهُ فَقَدَّرَهُ ثُمَّ السَّبِيلَ يَسَّرَهُ
ثُمَّ أَمَاتَهُ فَأَقْبَرَهُ ثُمَّ إِذَا شَاءَ أَنْشَرَهُ (٨٠: ١٧-٢٢)

Woe to man! How ungrateful he is! From what has his Lord created him? From a drop of fluid. He made him and proportioned him. Then smoothed out the path for him. He then gave him death and had him placed in a grave. Then He will raise him again whenever He desires. (80:17-22)

Consider next the verses: يَخْرُجُ مِنْ بَيْنِ الصُّلْبِ وَالتَّرَائِبِ خُلِقَ مِنْ مَاءٍ دَافِقٍ (he has been created from a trivial squirting fluid that comes out from between the spine and the ribs). In these verses, the nature of this fluid, its way of exit and the place of its origin are pointed out. This is done so that man comes to know that this fluid is not a rarity nor does it originate from a place which is beyond the jurisdiction of God; it bursts forth from between the spine and chest and later providence fashions it into whatever form and structure it wants to and then brings it from the womb of the mother. The implication is that how is it not possible for the Almighty whose great power and wisdom a person is able to witness in one's own self to bring him back to life. Sūrah Infiṭār discusses this very aspect in the following words:

يَا أَيُّهَا الْإِنْسَانُ مَا غَرَّكَ بِرَبِّكَ الْكَرِيمِ الَّذِي خَلَقَكَ فَسَوَّاكَ فَعَدَلَكَ فِي أَيِّ صُورَةٍ مَا
شَاءَ رَكَّبَكَ كَلَّا بَلْ تُكَذِّبُونَ بِالذِّينِ (٨٢: ٦-٩)

O Man! What is it that has lured you away from your Beneficent Lord, Who made your sketch, then fashioned you and then gave you due proportion and He put you together in whatever shape He pleased. [There is no doubt about the power of this God]; in fact, you want to deny reward and punishment; [for this reason you are putting forth such doubts]. (82:6-9)

The verse إِنَّهُ عَلَى رَجْعِهِ لَقَادِرٌ refers to the fact that the Almighty Who has displayed such majestic power and wisdom in creating man is certainly able to re-create him once he dies. The antecedent of the pronoun in رَجْعِهِ is the “man” who is asked in the verse فَلْيَنْظُرِ الْإِنْسَانُ مِمَّ خُلِقَ to reflect on his creation. It should be kept in consideration that though the words used are general, the real address is directed at the Quraysh. It was the Quraysh who wanted to render ineffective the Qur’ānic *indhār* by

creating such senseless doubts.

يَوْمَ تُبْلَى السَّرَائِرُ⁴(٩)

Mentioned in this verse is the nature of accountability people will be faced on that day. The implication is that not only perceptible words and deeds will be assessed, but covert deeds, ill-intentions and evil secrets will also be examined. The Almighty has instruments which are able to detect and record deeds done and words uttered in the most concealed of places. These instruments will be able to disclose the extent of sincerity or lack of it in each and every deed. It should be kept in mind that on that day even the limbs of a person will bear witness to all his deeds. So when limbs will bear witness, what possibility is left for a secret to remain a secret?

فَمَا لَهُ مِنْ قُوَّةٍ وَلَا نَاصِرٍ⁵(١٠)

On that day, a person will neither have his own power and strength to defend himself nor anyone from amongst his supporters and comrades or even his deities and intercessors to back and support him. The inner and outer selves of a person will be exposed like an open book. Only the decision of God will be implemented without any hindrance or hesitation.

وَالسَّمَاءِ ذَاتِ الرَّجْعِ (١١) وَالْأَرْضِ ذَاتِ الصَّدْعِ⁶(١٢)

In the previous verses, the Hereafter and life after death are substantiated through man's being and existence. Here, in these verses, this premise is substantiated through some physical phenomena.

The word رَجْعٌ is explained by linguists to mean (continuous rain). Such rain, of course, is instrumental in blessing the earth with life and greenery.

The word صَدْعٌ means "to split asunder". Rain opens the pores of the earth and it swells by absorbing water and very soon becomes lush and verdant. Though this bloom is not mentioned in words, there is a strong contextual indication to it. There is great brevity in the style adopted, since the premise is substantiated through swearing oaths.

At other places in the Qur'ān, it is expressed in various styles that re-creating mankind is no difficult a proposition for God at all. Those who were doubting this are censured; they are chided for denying something

4. On that day, all secrets will be scrutinized.

5. Then at that time neither will he have any power nor any helper.

6. The sky when rain bursts forth from it and the earth which splits asunder bear witness.

they witness every day. In Sūrah Anbiyā, such doubters are referred to thus:

أَوَلَمْ يَرَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنَّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ كَانَتَا رَتْقًا فَفَتَقْنَاهُمَا وَجَعَلْنَا مِنَ الْمَاءِ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ حَيٍّ أَفَلَا يُؤْمِنُونَ (٣٠:٢١)

Are the disbelievers unaware that the heavens and the earth were joined in one solid mass which We tore asunder, and that We have enlivened everything from water. (21:30)

One can look up the explanation of the above verse in this *tafsīr*. The fact that the sky and the earth were blocked alludes to the fact that neither did water rain down from the sky nor did the earth sprout any vegetation. However, when the Almighty opens the pores of the sky and sends down water, the earth also opens up the doors of its treasures. Similarly, whenever God wants, He will make mankind rise from this earth in which it is buried.

إِنَّهُ لَقَوْلُ فَصْلٍ (١٣) وَمَا هُوَ إِلَّا هَزْلٌ (١٤)⁷

Just as in the previous *sūrah*, the rejecters of the Day of Judgement are warned to not make fun of the admonition sounded to them by the Qur'ān and that this Qur'ān is an exalted discourse revealed from the guarded tablet, similarly, at the end of this *sūrah* also a new style is adopted to inform its addressees of the fact that the day of accountability which the Qur'ān is informing them of is an indubitable reality; one day, they shall have to face it come what may; hence they should not make fun of it; prudence demands that they should listen to it carefully and understand it and prepare for the advent of that day.

إِنَّهُمْ يَكِيدُونَ كَيْدًا (١٥) وَأَكِيدُ كَيْدًا (١٦)⁸

Here in these verses, the Prophet (sws) is assured that if people are making fun of his admonition then it is not because they really have some doubts in their hearts which could be removed through reasoning or by seeing some miracle. These doubts are being put forward only to escape the reality. The objective is that neither they should listen to the Prophet (sws) nor allow the common man to accept his teachings. In this manner, their religious leadership will remain intact and they will be able to follow the whims they have been following.

7. That this is a decisive word. And it is no jest.

8. They are conniving a plot and I am also devising a plan.

The verse وَأَكِيدُ كَيْدًا (I am also devising a plan) is the Almighty's response to the plot they were conniving. As per this plan, He is giving them respite so that they reach their prescribed term and when they are seized by Him, they will be left with no excuse. The naive people are regarding this respite given to them as their success. In reality, they have been caught in the noose of the Almighty's law of retribution. The more time they are being given, the tighter is becoming the Almighty's clasp. This, in fact, is just an explanation in different words of what is said in the previous *sūrah* thus: وَاللَّهُ مِنْ وَرَائِهِمْ مُحِيطٌ (٨٥: ٢٠) (and Allah is surrounding them from all sides, (85:20)).

فَمَهْلُ الْكَافِرِينَ أَمَهُلُهُمْ رُوَيْدًا⁹ (١٧)

The implication is that when the Almighty is surrounding them from all sides, whatever respite they get should not be any cause of alarm for the Prophet (sws); therefore, he too should grant them reprieve for some time; he, while getting tired of their demands and accusations, should also not desire from the Almighty to show them a sign of the promised punishment or to even obliterate them completely.

The expression أَمَهُلُهُمْ رُوَيْدًا is an explanation of the initial part of the verse: the respite is not to be of an unspecified duration; it is only for a short time so that they can revel in whatever merrymaking they want to; they will have to meet their fate one day.

A special thing worth considering here is that the Prophet (sws) is being asked to give them respite, which, in other words, means that the reins of their fate have been handed over to him by the Almighty; He only desires that the Prophet (sws) should give them a little more time.

This brings us to the end of the *tafsīr* of this *sūrah*. فالحمد لله على احسانه (gratitude be to God for His blessings).

Lahore,

23rd October, 1979 AD

1st Dhū al-Hijjah, 1399 AH

9. So give respite to these disbelievers; leave them a while.

Sūrah A‘lā

Central Theme and Relationship with the Preceding Sūrah

Sūrah Tāriq, the previous *sūrah* ended on urging the Prophet (sws) to show patience and to wait for the decision of God. He was told that those who have become persistent in denying him have been given respite by the Almighty according to His established practice in this regard and this period is soon to end. He was asked to give them respite also; soon they will see the consequences of their rebellious attitude; he should rest assured that they will not be able to escape God’s grasp; He has total control over them.

Now, in this *sūrah*, while ignoring these stubborn elements from among the Quraysh, the Prophet (sws) is addressed directly and given glad tidings that every work of God manifests itself in a gradual and sequential way and this gradual and sequential way is based entirely on His wisdom. The Prophet (sws) should trust Him; soon the time is going to arrive when his efforts will bear fruit and all hindrances which stand in his way shall be removed. This change in address is evident in at least the next ten *sūrahs*. If ever the adversaries are addressed, they are addressed in a secondary manner. It is the Prophet (sws) who is primarily addressed and through various styles all his worries and fears which came his way during the course of his preaching or which were expected to come are dispelled.

Analysis of the Discourse

Following is the sequence of the discourse of the *sūrah*:

Verses (1-5): The Prophet (sws) is directed to continuously extol the Almighty and is reminded of those of God’s attributes which testify that all His works manifest in a gradual and sequential manner. Just as vegetation gradually becomes lush and dense, similarly a person’s physical and intellectual abilities also reach their culmination in a gradual manner.

Verses (6-8): Glad tidings are given to the Prophet (sws) that he too will be dealt with in accordance with the above outlined law. The favour of revelations that he is receiving will gradually reach its culmination and will be taught to him in such a thorough manner that he will not forget even a word of it except if the Almighty wants him to leave aside

something. He is aware of the apparent and the hidden. He fully knows the circumstances the Prophet (sws) is facing or will be facing. From within hardships, He will create ease for him.

Verses (9-13): The Prophet (sws) is directed not to go after the stubborn and the obdurate. He is not responsible for making those listen who do not want to listen. Only they will listen who have fear of the Almighty and the Hereafter. The unfortunate will evade it and then see their fate.

Verses (14-15): Glad tidings of success are given to the fortunate who purified themselves and remembered their Lord and prayed to Him.

Verses (16-19): The disbelievers are addressed and admonished on their real mistake: giving preference to this world over the next. It is for this reason that the message of the Prophet (sws) does not find roots in their hearts even though it is the life of the Hereafter which is better than this life and also eternal. All previous prophets and scriptures have taught this.

Text and Translation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
 سَبِّحْ اسْمَ رَبِّكَ الْأَعْلَى (١) الَّذِي خَلَقَ فَسَوَّى (٢) وَالَّذِي قَدَّرَ فَهَدَى (٣) وَالَّذِي أَخْرَجَ
 الْمَرْعَى (٤) فَجَعَلَهُ غُثَاءً أَحْوَى (٥) سَنُقْرِئُكَ فَلَا تَنسَى (٦) إِلَّا مَا شَاءَ اللَّهُ إِنَّهُ يَعْلَمُ الْجَهْرَ
 وَمَا يَخْفَى (٧) وَنُيْسِرُكَ لِلْيُسْرَى (٨) فَذَكَرْ إِنَّ نَفْعَ الذِّكْرِى (٩) سَيَذَكِّرُ مَنْ يَخْشَى (١٠)
 وَيَتَجَنَّبُهَا الْأَشْقَى (١١) الَّذِي يَصْلَى النَّارَ الْكُبْرَى (١٢) ثُمَّ لَا يَمُوتُ فِيهَا وَلَا يَحْيَا (١٣) قَدْ
 أَفْلَحَ مَنْ تَزَكَّى (١٤) وَذَكَرَ اسْمَ رَبِّهِ فَصَلَّى (١٥) بَلْ تُؤْثِرُونَ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا (١٦) وَالْآخِرَةَ خَيْرٌ
 وَأَبْقَى (١٧) إِنَّ هَذَا لَفِي الصُّحُفِ الْأُولَى (١٨) صُحُفِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَمُوسَى (١٩)

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Ever Merciful.

Glorify the name of your Lord! The Most High, Who made a sketch and then perfected it, and Who set destinies and then gave guidance and Who brought forth vegetation and then made it lush green. (1-5)

We shall recite to you, then you will not forget except what Allah pleases. He knows what is apparent and what is hidden. And We shall lead you towards ease. (6-8)

So, remind them, if reminding is beneficial. The fearful will benefit from it and the wretched will evade it. He will enter the Great Fire. Then neither will he die nor live in it. (9-13)

Successful shall be he who purified himself and remembered his Lord's name and then prayed. (14-15)

But you people give preference to this worldly life even though the life

to come is better and more lasting. This is the teaching of the earlier scriptures as well – the scriptures of Abraham and Moses. (16-19)

Explanation

سَبِّحْ اسْمَ رَبِّكَ الْأَعْلَى¹

It has been explained at many places in this *tafsīr* that the word *tasbīh* serves to absolve the Almighty of all things which are against His majesty. It is the true comprehension of God which is the fountainhead of knowledge and cognizance, power and belief. If an error creeps into this comprehension, man is led away from true knowledge and gets caught in the tentacles of Satan. The result is that the heart of a person becomes devoid of the blessing of belief and trust and of the light of inner satisfaction. He also becomes bereft of the resolve to persevere and persist against the vicissitudes of life. It is the true comprehension of God and His remembrance which strengthens the heart of a person and keeps it content and on the right path: (٢٨:١٣) لَا يَذْكُرُ اللَّهُ تَظْمِنُ الْقُلُوبُ (surely in the remembrance of God all hearts are comforted, (13:28))

It has been explained at various places in this *tafsīr* that the highest form of *tasbīh* is the prayer, especially the *tahajjud* prayer. However, just as air is the most essential requirement for the physical existence of a human being, similarly, the remembrance of God is essential for his spiritual existence. For this reason, not only during the prayers, it is essential that one keeps his heart fresh with the remembrance of God while carrying out other routines of life so that Satan is not able to get the better of a person. I have already explained this aspect under the following verse of Sūrah Muzzammil: (٧:٧٣) إِنَّ لَكَ فِي النَّهَارِ سَبْحًا طَوِيلًا (During the daytime also, you have a lot of time for glorifying the Almighty, (73:7)).

Here the Prophet (sws) has been directed to do *tasbīh* to attain fortitude and perseverance; hence the word is used in its comprehensive meaning here.

الَّذِي خَلَقَ فَسَوَّى²

In this verse and some of the subsequent ones, attention is directed at certain attributes of the Almighty – attributes which show that all of Almighty's works and plans are carried out in a gradual manner – a scheme which itself is totally based on His wisdom. Thus it is essential for a person to fulfil the directives of God with patience and steadfastness and remain in the hope that the final destination of the path

1. Glorify the name of your Lord! The Most High.

2. Who made a sketch and then perfected it.

on which He has directed a person to tread will soon come with all its blessings. Any delay in this is based on the wisdom of God and any hardships he may encounter in this way will carry benefits for him not only in this world but also in the Hereafter.

The common meaning of the word خَلَقَ is “to create”; however, it also means “to make a sketch or an effigy of something”. For example, it is used in this meaning in the verse: أَخْلُقْ لَكُمْ مِنَ الطِّينِ كَهَيْئَةِ الطَّيْرِ فَأَنْفُخْ فِيهِ (from clay I will make for you the effigy of a bird. Then I shall breathe into it and, by God’s leave, it shall become a living bird, (3:49))

The word تَسْوِيَةٌ (verbal noun of سَوَّى) means “to improve something”, “to flatten something” and “to perfect something”. Contextual indication shows that here it is used in the last of these meanings. The implication is that if man only reflects upon his own creation, he will come to realize that he has not been made instantaneously; he has reached culmination after passing through many stages. Initially, a sketch is made of him and slowly he passes through various stages and ultimately becomes a complete individual.

وَالَّذِي قَدَّرَ فَهَدَىٰ (٣)³

Same is the case regarding the development of a person’s abilities and in his reaching the pinnacle of his material and spiritual skills. The Almighty has also placed in him the thirst for things on which he is dependent and has also provided for him the means and resources to acquire these things, and also blessed him with the ability to benefit from these. For example, if a child needs milk, then he has been provided with it through the bosoms of his mother and has also been guided to suck her bosoms and feed himself with it.

Later, when his needs expand, each person is provided from the repositories and treasures of this earth. He has also been given the intellect required to search for these treasures and adopt ways to reach them and invent means to benefit from them.

Similarly, for this spiritual and moral development, the Almighty has ingrained in him the awareness of good and evil and sent prophets and messengers to him for his guidance. These personalities were sent to instruct him about the path which is in accordance with his nature and benefiting from which will make him attain salvation and also to delineate to him the path which is incongruous with his nature and will lead him to doom.

Moreover, the Almighty has destined for man all phases and places, tests and trials he is going to encounter from his birth to death. He has also divulged to man the way to deal with all these things. If he adopts this way, he will safely pass through the vicissitudes of life and if he deviates from it and follows his own whims and desires, he will end up doomed. Such are the comprehensive meanings implied in this brief verse. The details abound and it is not possible to exhaustively state them here. I have already explained these under the following verse of Sūrah Tāhā: (٥٠:٢٠) قَالَ رَبُّنَا الَّذِي أَعْطَى كُلَّ شَيْءٍ حَلْقَهُ ثُمَّ هَدَى (Our Lord,” he replied, “is He that gave all creatures their physical form and then rightly guided them,” (20:50))

وَالَّذِي أَخْرَجَ الْمَرْعَى (٤) فَجَعَلَهُ غُثَاءً أَحْوَى (٥)⁴

There is a literary complexity which arises in these verses. It needs to be understood first so that the real stress of these verses can be appreciated.

Generally, people have translated the expression غُثَاءً أَحْوَى as “black litter” or “black waste material”; although the word غُثَاءً in Arabic means froth and waste material, however, the word أَحْوَى is never used for blackness which results from decay, decomposition and old age; it, on the contrary, is used for reddish or greenish blackness which is evident on something because of freshness, fertility and luxuriance. It is often used as an adjective for vegetation and orchards and without any exception is used for their luxuriant growth and intense lushness. From this root meaning, it came to be used for a strong, burly and robust young man. The reason for this is that people who are very healthy and who have plenty of blood in their bodies have blackish red lips. Thus, the famous poet of the *jāhilliyah*, period Ta'bbata Sharraṇ, while extolling a person says:

مسبل في الحيّ أحوى رفل
وإذا يغزوا فسمع أزل

(In this manner, he remains a well-dressed, fair and red complexioned young smart person; however, when he enters a battle field, he becomes a lion of the jungle.)⁵

The word غُثَاءً though means the froth of butter and the waste material

4. And Who brought forth vegetation and then made it lush green.

5. Khaṭīb al-Tabrizī, *Sharḥ diwān al-ḥamāsah*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-qalam, n.d.), 344.

of flood water, it is also very commonly used for the vegetation which becomes dense and blackish because of fertility of the land. Imām Farāhī in his *Mufradāt al-Qur'ān* has furnished a number of couplets from classical Arabic poetry of the *jāhiliyyah* period to substantiate this meaning. For the sake of brevity, I will confine myself to citing just one couplet of Qaṭṭāmī which he wrote while praising a valley. He says:

حلوا بأخضر قد مالت سرارته
من ذي غناء على الأعراض انضاد

(They descended in a lush green valley on the borders of which luxuriant and thick undergrowth was enmeshed and stacked on each other in layers.)⁶

In the verse under discussion, since the word غُثَاءٌ is qualified by the adjective أَحْوَى hence it is necessarily used in the second of the meanings referred to above otherwise there would be great disagreement between the noun and the adjective which qualifies it. The reason, as I have pointed out above, is that the word أَحْوَى is never used for the blackness which is the result of decay, decomposition and old age of something. There is no example of such usage in classical Arabic. Moreover, the context and placement of the verse also does not accept this meaning, as shall be presently explained. Hence the correct meaning of the verses: فَجَعَلَهُ غُثَاءً أَحْوَى وَالَّذِي أَخْرَجَ الْمَرْعَى would be that one should extol the Almighty who brings forth vegetation in the form of delicate stem-stalks and then makes them luxuriant and blackish green.

سَنُقَرِّئُكَ فَلَا تَنْسَى (٦) إِلَّا مَا شَاءَ اللَّهُ إِنَّهُ يَعْلَمُ الْجَهْرَ وَمَا يَخْفَى (٧)⁷

These verses state the real message which was meant to be put across to the Prophet (sws) and for which the previous verses served as an introduction. The implication is that the law of gradual development which is in currency to perfect man's being and to apportion and destine abilities and energies and to nurture them and which is instrumental in producing vegetation and making it grow, the same law will be employed by the Almighty in dealing with him. The phases of his prophethood and the divine revelation sent down to him will also reach

6. Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Farāhī, *Mufradat al-qur'ān*, 1st ed. (Azamgarh: Maṭba' al-islāh, 1358 AH), 58.

7. We shall recite to you, then you will not forget except what Allah pleases. He knows what is apparent and what is hidden.

their culmination in a gradual manner. Soon the time will arrive when he will surmount all the difficulties of the path he has been asked to tread and will reach his destination

The context and occasion of the verse سَنُقَرِّئُكَ فَلَا تَنْسَى is exactly the same as the following verses of Sūrah Tāha and Sūrah Qiyāmah respectively: وَلَا تَعْجَلْ بِالْقُرْآنِ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ يُقْضَىٰ إِلَيْكَ وَحْيُهُ (and be not in haste with the Qur'ān before its revelation is completed to you, (20:114)) and لَا تُحَرِّكْ بِهِ لِسَانَكَ لِتَعْجَلَ بِهِ (do not move your tongue swiftly to hastily acquire this [Qur'an] (75:16-19)). While explaining these verses, I have written in detail that the only support to the Prophet (sws) to combat the hindrances and opposition he was facing in this period of his preaching mission was this divine help which was sent down to him in the form of revelations. This would provide necessary resources to him to tread this path and the guidance that was needed in future. Similarly, this would also help him in answering the objections and responding to the demands raised by his adversaries. For these multifarious reasons, he would always be waiting for divine revelation to descend to him and when it would come, he would show haste and eagerness in acquiring it. This impatience is similar to the one shown by an infant in reaching out for its mother's bosom. He would be so enthusiastic at this instance that he would want that he acquire all the revelation in one go and since the Qur'ān was also a great asset which was being entrusted to him by the Almighty, he would repeat each and every word of the revelation lest any of it might slip away from his memory.

The Almighty has assured him at his eagerness and hastiness: He has been told to not show haste; the Almighty Himself has set a timeline for it according to which it would be revealed and there is great wisdom in this scheme.

The Almighty has also assured the Prophet (sws) that he should not fret over its preservation. The Almighty Himself has taken upon Himself to preserve it in such a foolproof manner that the Prophet (sws) will not forget it. In Sūrah Qiyāmah, this assertion is made in the following words:

لَا تُحَرِّكْ بِهِ لِسَانَكَ لِتَعْجَلَ بِهِ إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا جَمْعَهُ وَقُرْآنَهُ فَإِذَا قَرَأَهُ فَاتَّبِعْ قُرْآنَهُ ثُمَّ إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا بَيَانَهُ (٧٥ : ١٦-١٩)

Do not move your tongue hastily on it. Indeed, upon Us is its collection and recital. So when We have recited it out, follow this recital. Then upon Us is to explain it. (75:16-19)

The expression إِلَّا مَا شَاءَ اللَّهُ (except what Allah pleases) alludes to the fact that only temporary and interim things are an exception to this rule. The Almighty will Himself inform the Prophet (sws) when their term expires. The reference is to the temporary directives which were later abrogated.

The sentence إِنَّهُ يَعْلَمُ الْجَهْرَ وَمَا يَخْفَى (He knows what is apparent and what is hidden) implies that the Almighty is not unaware of the circumstances the Prophet (sws) is passing through. He is fully aware of them and knows what is apparent and what is hidden in this regard. The implication is that the Almighty is aware of all his worries as well as his prayers and also aware of the open pranks and the hidden conspiracies of his enemies. When everything is in His knowledge and He also possesses power and authority, the Prophet (sws) should rest assured that he will be provided whatever help he requires. This subject is mentioned in even more detail in Sūrah Tāha in the following words:

لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا وَمَا تَحْتَ الثَّرَى وَإِنْ تَجَهَّرَ بِالْقَوْلِ فَإِنَّهُ يَعْلَمُ السِّرَّ وَأَخْفَى (٢٠: ٦-٧)

In His control is what is in the heavens and the earth and all that lies between them and also what is beneath the earth. Whether you speak aloud or silently, he has knowledge of all that is hidden and what is most hidden. (20:6-7)

It should be kept in consideration that that true faith and trust in God emanates from a strong awareness of His all-embracing knowledge and His all-encompassing power.

وَنُيَسِّرْكَ لِلْيُسْرَى (٨)⁸

These words give glad tidings to the Prophet (sws) in very clear words: the hardships he is currently facing will one day end and the Almighty will lead him towards ease. The word يُسْرَى is an adjective of a suppressed noun similar in meaning to طَرِيقَةٌ. I have already explained the meaning of تَيْسِيرٌ at some place in this *tafsīr*. It means to prepare something for a higher objective. It is evident from this word that the difficulties the Prophet (sws) is currently passing through are meant to train and discipline him and so that the Almighty can make him entitled to His favours and blessings in the future. This is actually the natural corollary of the law of God stated above in the words: وَالَّذِي قَدَّرَ فَهَدَىٰ فَجَعَلَهُ غَنَاءً أَحْوَىٰ أَخْرَجَ الْمَرْغَىٰ وَالَّذِي

their destinies and then gave guidance and Who brought forth vegetation and then made it lush green).

In other words, the hardships he is encountering are right in accordance with the law of God to train and discipline him. The way ahead is clear. He should rest assured that he will be guided and it is only after difficulties that ease comes.

فَذَكِّرْ إِن نَّفَعَتِ الذِّكْرَى (٩)⁹

The verse implies that the Prophet (sws) should not get perturbed and distressed. It is not his responsibility to force down his message on others. His only responsibility is to remind others when he thinks that they are inclined to listen to him; otherwise he should leave them to their fate.

سَيَذَكِّرُ مَنْ يَخْشَى (١٠) وَيَتَجَنَّبُهَا الْأَشْقَى (١١) الَّذِي يَصْلَى النَّارَ الْكُبْرَى (١٢) ثُمَّ لَا يَمُوتُ فِيهَا وَلَا يَحْيَا (١٣)¹⁰

These verses inform the Prophet (sws) of the type of people who will pay heed to his message and those who will evade it. The implication is that those who are evading his calls are not doing so because there is some shortcoming in it or in its preacher; in fact, it is because they themselves have something wrong in them. They regard this life to be all that there is. They have no fear of the Hereafter. Such unfortunate people should be left to themselves. They shall be flung in the great Fire which is ready for them. They will neither live in it nor die and will remain in its eternal torment. They will wish for death but it will not come to relieve them of their miseries.

Here it might be appropriate to refresh our memories about the practice of God that I have explained at many places in this *tafsīr*: people who honour and protect the light with which the Almighty has lit up their nature find the message of a prophet as the call of their hearts. Even if this light has dimmed, soon or late they wake up after being prodded and prompted by their prophet; however, in people in which this light has been totally extinguished, they are rather like the dead; only the trumpet blown on the Day of Judgement will awaken them.

In the following verse of Sūrah Ghāshiyah, the succeeding *sūrah* and counterpart of this *sūrah*, this subject is referred to in even more detail:

9. So, remind them, if reminding is beneficial.

10. The fearful will benefit from it and the wretched will evade it. He will enter the Great Fire. Then neither will he die nor live in it.

فَذَكِّرْ إِنَّمَا أَنْتَ مُذَكِّرٌ لَسْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ بِمُصَيِّرٍ إِلَّا مَنْ تَوَلَّى وَكَفَرَ فَيُعَذِّبُهُ اللَّهُ
الْعَذَابَ الْأَكْبَرَ إِنَّ إِلَيْنَا إِيَابُهُمْ ثُمَّ إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا حِسَابَهُمْ (٨٨: ٢١-٢٦)

Just remind them, for your duty is only to remind them; you are not to force them. [He who will embrace faith, will succeed]. As for he who turns away and denies, God will punish him gravely. Indeed, to Us will they return. Then it is upon Us to call them to account. (88:21-26)

These verses mention the words الْعَذَابَ الْأَكْبَرَ (the great torment) and in the verse under discussion the words are النَّارَ الْكُبْرَى (the great fire). Both refer to the same thing in slightly different styles, and, God willing, I shall explain them in the *tafsīr* of the next *sūrah*.

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ تَزَكَّى (١٤) وَذَكَرَ اسْمَ رَبِّهِ فَصَلَّى (١٥)¹¹

In the previous verses, the fate of people who had evaded the calls of the Prophet (sws) is mentioned. Now in these verses is mentioned the reward of people who are referred to earlier by the words سَيَذَكِّرُهُم مِّنْ يَّخْشَى (he who is fearful will benefit from it). They are the ones who benefited from the reminders of the Prophet (sws) and who purified and cleansed themselves from the filth of polytheism and disbelief. For them there is success in this world and in the Hereafter also they will receive the pleasure and blessings of the Almighty.

The words وَذَكَرَ اسْمَ رَبِّهِ فَصَلَّى (and remembered his Lord's name and then prayed) mention the foremost manifestation of this purification and its real method also. I have indicated above that the fountainhead of all knowledge is the names of God. It is from these names that the attributes of God become evident and it is evident from only these attributes what our beliefs should be and the obligations these beliefs impose on us regarding God and His people. In other words, the prayer is mentioned as the foremost manifestation of belief in the Almighty. I have elaborated at various places in this *tafsīr* that the foremost manifestation of belief is the prayer and then it is that belief which is the foundation of all the directives of the *sharī'ah* and is its guardian also. More details of this can be found in the explanation of the initial verses of Sūrah Mu'minūn.

11. Successful shall be he who purified himself and remembered his Lord's name and then prayed.

بَلْ تُؤْثِرُونَ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا (١٦) وَالْآخِرَةَ خَيْرٌ وَأَبْقَى (١٧)¹²

Here at the end the Quraysh are addressed and the real reason of their adversity is unravelled: It is their blind love for this world which is the actual cause of this animosity. They are not ready to believe in the Hereafter nor ready to give up their illegitimate vested interests for it and for this reason they invent baseless doubts and spread them among the commoners to give them the wrong impression that they are justified in rejecting Islam; however, they must remember that they are being very naïve in losing the eternal kingdom of heaven by giving in to the love of this very transient world; they should also consider the fact that the Hereafter is more lasting and permanent and if they have any sense they should try to reap its rewards.

إِنَّ هَذَا لَفِي الصُّحُفِ الْأُولَى (١٨) صُحُفِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَمُوسَى (١٩)¹³

The implication of this verse is that whatever the Prophet (sws) is telling his addressees is not something new or unique. Earlier prophets too taught no different a message. The message they gave was that real life is the life of the Hereafter and there only a person's own deeds will be of any benefit to him. No other person will bear any other person's burden. In Sūrah Najm, this aspect is stated in the following words:

أَمْ لَمْ يُنَبَّأْ بِمَا فِي صُحُفِ مُوسَى وَإِبْرَاهِيمَ الَّذِي وَفَّى أَلَّا تَزِرُ وَازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَى (٥٣: ٣٦-٣٨)

Has he not been informed of the teaching of the Scriptures of Moses and of Abraham, who passed every test he was put in; [it is written] that no soul shall bear another's burden. (53:36-38)

The scriptures given to Moses and to a number of prophets sent to the Israelites are today found in the books of the Bible. Even though they have been altered quite a lot and their status is not much different than books of history, however, all of these very clearly and very effectively depict the teachings of monotheism and life in the hereafter at numerous occasions. So moving are these scriptures that whichever is read, one's faith is revived. Though Abraham (sws) did not leave a scripture for the guidance of his people and it was more in the shape of oral sermons and exhortations, however one branch of his progeny – the Israelites – had

12. But you people give preference to this worldly life even though the life to come is etter and more lasting.

13. This is the teaching of the earlier scriptures as well – the scriptures of Abraham and Moses.

preserved them in writing and their prophets continued to remind them of these teachings in their respective eras. Irrefutable testimony to this is found even today and their scriptures, and the Qur'ān has also referred to it at various instances.

The other branch of Abraham's progeny – the Ishmaelites – did not preserve his teachings in writing. The reason for this was that they were unlettered people not conversant with writing. They did preserve his teachings in the form of traditions for some time; however, with the passage of time they were gradually thrown into oblivion and religious innovations dominated these teachings to such an extent that they were totally forgotten. After the advent of the Prophet Muḥammad (sws), these teachings were not only revived, they were also completed and it was these teachings that came to be regarded as the foundation of this perfect religion which is now the real religion of God till the Day of Judgement.

With the grace and blessings of God, the *tafsīr* of this *sūrah* comes to its completion. فالحمد لله على إحسانه (all gratitude be to God for his favours).

Lahore

2nd November, 1979 AD

11th Dhū al-Ḥijjah 1399 AH

Sūrah Ghāshiyah

Central Theme and Relationship with the Preceding Sūrah

This *sūrah* forms a pair with Sūrah A'lā, the previous *sūrah*.

There is no essential difference between the central themes of both *sūrahs*. Just as the previous *sūrah* sounds assurance to the Prophet (sws), this *sūrah* also sounds assurance to him. However, there is a difference between the two as regard their style of address, methodology of reasoning and their brief or comprehensive treatment of motifs. Initially, in this *sūrah* is depicted the difference in fate which the good and the wicked will meet in the Hereafter and it is proven that this fate is an obvious outcome of the attributes of power, providence and mercy of the Creator of this universe. At the end, the motif “remind them if reminding them is beneficial,” (97:8) briefly referred to the previous *sūrah* is explained: the responsibility of the Prophet (sws) is only to communicate the truth. It is not his responsibility to force others to accept it. He is told not to go after the stubborn and the obdurate; he should leave their matter to God who is enough to deal with them.

Analysis of the Discourse

Verses (1-6): A mention of the fate to be encountered by people who live in this world in complete disregard to the next world.

Verses (7-16): A portrayal of the success and triumph of people who live in this world while fearing the next.

Verses (17-20): A reference to certain prominent signs of the world which show that the Creator of this universe has great power and wisdom, He is very compassionate and is very gracious and affable to His creatures. It is the obvious outcome of His attributes of power, mercy, wisdom and providence that He one day bring about a day of justice in which He rewards the pious and punishes the wicked. If this world continues without the advent of such a day, then this will negate all these attributes of God; in fact, it will, God forbid, prove that He has made this world to be a place which is not governed by moral laws and that good and evil are equal in His eyes.

Verses (21-26): The Prophet (sws) is assured that what he is warning people of is an obvious reality; signs which point to it are very manifest. He should not despair and lose hope because of the attitude of the

stubborn. His responsibility is to only communicate the truth. The Almighty will not hold him accountable if people accept or reject it. He should submit the matter of those who are not willing to listen to him to God. They will one day have to return to God and He will definitely call them to account.

Text and Translation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

هَلْ أَتَاكَ حَدِيثُ الْغَاشِيَةِ (١) وَجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ خَاشِعَةٌ (٢) عَامِلَةٌ نَاصِبَةٌ (٣) تَصَلَّى نَارًا
حَامِيَةً (٤) تُسْقَى مِنْ عَيْنٍ آيَةٍ (٥) لَيْسَ لَهُمْ طَعَامٌ إِلَّا مِنْ صَرِيحٍ (٦) لَا يُسْنِنُ وَلَا يُغْنِي
مِنْ جُوعٍ (٧) وَجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ نَاعِمَةٌ (٨) لِسَعْيِهَا رَاضِيَةٌ (٩) فِي جَنَّةٍ عَالِيَةٍ (١٠) لَا تَسْمَعُ
فِيهَا لَآغِيَةً (١١) فِيهَا عَيْنٌ جَارِيَةٌ (١٢) فِيهَا سُرُرٌ مَرْفُوعَةٌ (١٣) وَأَكْوَابٌ مَوْضُوعَةٌ (١٤)
وَنَمَارِقُ مَصْفُوفَةٌ (١٥) وَزَرَارِيُّ مَبْثُوثَةٌ (١٦) أَفَلَا يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَى الْإِبِلِ كَيْفَ خُلِقَتْ (١٧)
وَالِى السَّمَاءِ كَيْفَ رُفِعَتْ (١٨) وَإِلَى الْجِبَالِ كَيْفَ نُصِبَتْ (١٩) وَإِلَى الْأَرْضِ كَيْفَ
سُطِحَتْ (٢٠) فَذَكِّرْ إِنَّمَا أَنْتَ مُذَكِّرٌ (٢١) لَسْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ بِمُسَيِّرٍ (٢٢) إِلَّا مَنْ تَوَلَّى وَكَفَرَ
(٢٣) فَيُعَذِّبُهُ اللَّهُ الْعَذَابَ الْأَكْبَرَ (٢٤) إِنَّ إِلَيْنَا إِيَابَهُمْ (٢٥) ثُمَّ إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا حِسَابَهُمْ (٢٦)

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Ever Merciful.

Has the news of the all-engulfing calamity reached you?! Many faces on that day will be downcast and worn out. They will enter the blazing fire. They will be made to drink from a sizzling spring. Their only food will be thorny bushes, which will neither fatten them nor satisfy their hunger. (1-7)

Many faces on that day will be fresh, pleased with their endeavours, in a lofty garden where they will hear no useless talk. In it, there will be a running spring. In it, there will be thrones set high, and goblets well-arranged, and carpets well set out, and cushions spread all over. (8-16)

Do they not see the camels, how they have been made? And do they not behold the sky, how it has been raised high? And do they not look at the mountains, how they have been set aloft? And do they not see the earth, how it has been spread out. (17-20)

Just remind them, for your duty is only to remind them; you are not to force them. As for he who turns away and denies, God will punish him gravely. Indeed, to Us will they return. Then it is upon Us to call them to account. (21-26)

Explanation

هَلْ أَتَاكَ حَدِيثُ الْعَاشِيَةِ (١)¹

Questions expressed in such style are not meant to elicit an answer; they are meant to express the horror or majesty of something. The address in the verse can also be considered as general, however intrinsic evidence shows that the Prophet (sws) is addressed. Consequently, giving due regard to this aspect, the words at the end of the *sūrah* are: (فَذَكِّرْ إِنَّمَا أَنْتَ مُذَكِّرٌ (٨٨:٢١) (just remind them, for your duty is only to remind them, (21:88)).

The word *عَاشِيَةٌ* means “something which engulfs and enshrouds”. Here in this verse it is used as an attribute for the Day of Judgement. The reason for this is that the calamity of this day would be all-embracing; no one will be able to escape from it. Though the news (*حَدِيثُ*) of this calamity is described to the Prophet (sws); however, the purpose, as will be evident from subsequent verses, is to inform the disbelievers who in the first place did not even believe in the Hereafter, and if for some reason they did, they had no fear of it because they thought that they would be blessed with even more than what they had been given in this world.

وُجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ خَاشِعَةٌ (٢) غَامِلَةٌ نَّاصِبَةٌ (٣)²

As pointed out earlier, the question mentioned in the previous verse was not meant to elicit an answer; it was only meant to warn people that they should clearly hear what is being sounded to them. After this, the Qur’ān has itself replied that many faces on that day will be downcast and worn out.

The word *خَاشِعَةٌ* means “downcast and turned downwards”, while *غَامِلَةٌ* means “tired because of hard work” and *نَّاصِبَةٌ* means “worn out”. The implication is that when against their hope they would have to face Hell because of their misdeeds they would become pale with fear.

Although the word *وُجُوهٌ* (faces) is used to imply people, the word *وُجُوهٌ* is used to refer to their inner state because it is the face which is the most expressive of one’s inner state.

تَصْلَى نَارًا حَامِيَةً (٤) تُسْقَى مِنْ عَيْنٍ آتِيَةٍ (٥)³

The verses mention the cause of the anxiety and apprehension

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1. Has the news of the all-engulfing calamity reached you?!
 2. Many faces on that day will be downcast and worn out.
 3. They will enter the blazing fire. They will be made to drink from a sizzling spring.
-

mentioned in the previous verses. The word *أَيَّه* means “something which is boiling and seething.”

It is evident from other places of the Qur’ān that the anxiety of the sinners mentioned in this verse relates to the time when it becomes certain to them that they would be thrown into Hell:

وَوُجُوهُ يَوْمَئِذٍ بِآسِرَةٍ تَتَّبَعُنَّ أَنْ يَفْعَلَ بِهَا فَاقِرَةٌ (٧٥: ٢٤-٢٥)

And some faces will be gloomy on that Day apprehending that there is going to befall them that which breaks their backs. (75: 24-25)

Generally, people have understood that this state of the sinners is the one which will result after they have been cast into Hell; however, this is not true. Once these sinners are cast into Hell, their faces will not merely be anxious; they will be dragged on the fire and whatever else will happen to them is mentioned elsewhere in the Qur’ān.

لَيْسَ لَهُمْ طَعَامٌ إِلَّا مِنْ ضَرِيعٍ (٦) لَا يُسْمِنُ وَلَا يُغْنِي مِنْ جُوعٍ (٧)⁴

After food, this is a mention of the water which will be given to the sinners in Hell. *ضَرِيع* is a thorny and poisonous bush which no animal touches.

The purpose of the sentence is not to say they will not be fed with anything else except thorny bushes; the word *إِلَّا* is used here as a severed exception (*istithnā munqaṭi’*). To convey the above meaning, *ضَرِيع* should have belonged to the genre of edibles in any way. When this is not so, the exception is only meant to convey the fact that when they would find nothing to eat they will, out of frustration, try to eat the thorny bushes available to them there. This negation also does not refute the fact that other similar things would be present for the dwellers of Hell and which they would be compelled to eat. Thus it is mentioned in another verse that these sinners will have to consume *zaqqūm*:

إِنَّ شَجَرَةَ الزَّقُّومِ طَعَامٌ الْأَثِيمِ (٤٤: ٤٣-٤٤)

Indeed, the bush of *zaqqūm* shall be the food of sinners. (44:43-44)

Similarly, another verse mentions *ghislīn*:

4. Their only food will be thorny bushes, which will neither fatten them nor satisfy their hunger.

وَلَا طَعَامٌ إِلَّا مِنْ غَسِيلٍ لَا يَأْكُلُهُ إِلَّا الْخَاطِئُونَ (٦٩: ٣٦-٣٧)

And their food shall be the fluid in which wounds are washed. Only the sinners will eat it. (69:36-37)

It is evident from this that the dwellers of Hell shall not be given any food; they shall be given just those things which are not only are not edibles but also those which can only be swallowed by the dwellers of Hell.

Consider now the next verse: لَا يُسْمِنُ وَلَا يُغْنِي مِنْ جُوعٍ. The uses of food are two: to provide energy to the body and to satisfy the pangs of hunger. However, what will be served to the dwellers of Hell will fulfil neither of these uses. They will have to go through the agony of only chewing and swallowing it.

وُجُوهُ يَوْمَئِذٍ نَاعِمَةٌ (٨) لِسَعْيِهَا رَاضِيَةٌ (٩) فِي جَنَّةٍ عَالِيَةٍ (١٠)⁵

In these verses, the state of the believers is described. In Sūrah Qiyāmah, this state is described in the following words: وُجُوهُ يَوْمَئِذٍ تَاضِرَةٌ (٧٥: ٢٢-٢٣) (some faces will be joyous on that Day awaiting the graciousness of their Lord, (75:23-24)).

The previous verses mention the dejectedness, fatigue and frustration of the rejecters of the Day of Judgement. These verses, in contrast, mention the believers who spent their life for the Hereafter and succeeded in their test. Their faces will reflect the glow and radiance of eternal triumph.

The expression لِسَعْيِهَا رَاضِيَةٌ shows that their faces will glow and sparkle because the fruits of their labour will be before them. They toiled in the previous world to harvest these results. They will be fully satisfied with this outcome that they were generously rewarded for their deeds and the Almighty fulfilled all His promises He made with them. Details are forthcoming in the subsequent verses and the next sūrah also mentions a specific aspect in this regard. God willing, I will attempt to unfold some of its subtle implications.

The verse فِي جَنَّةٍ عَالِيَةٍ describes their abode in the Hereafter. They will be lodged in gardens situated on high ground. Arabs cherished gardens which were situated in lofty places and which were encircled by tall date-palms so that they appear elegant from far off and are also protected from calamities such as scorching winds and floods.

5. Many faces on that day will be fresh, pleased with their endeavours, in a lofty garden.

لَا تَسْمَعُ فِيهَا لَا غِيَةَ^٦ (١١)

The Qur'ān mentions at various places that the dwellers of Hell will start to curse each other as soon as they enter it: they will blame others for misleading them and had they not misled them, they would have remained rightly guided. Leaders and their followers will have an argument there. The followers will demand that their leaders be given double punishment because they misled them. The leaders will reply that they guided their followers to what they themselves believed and it is the followers who deliberately followed them and thus called for their own doom. On the other hand, the dwellers of Paradise will welcome one another with salutations and congratulations as a victorious team does. They will meet one another in a blissful mood. Love and sincerity will abound for one another. This atmosphere is portrayed in Sūrah Wāqī'ah thus:

لَا يَسْمَعُونَ فِيهَا لَغْوًا وَلَا تَأْثِيمًا إِلَّا قِيلًا سَلَامًا سَلَامًا (٥٦: ٢٥-٢٦)

There they shall hear no worthless conversation nor sinful speech. The atmosphere will resound with greetings of peace. (56:25-26)

Also worthy of note is the fact that the liquor drunk by the dwellers of Paradise will not make them lose their senses or make them delirious. It will not intoxicate them so that they have no control over their speech.

فِيهَا عَيْنٌ جَارِيَةٌ^٧ (١٢)

After a portrayal of the blissful atmosphere of Paradise, this verse portrays its picturesque sights. The spring mentioned here is only the one used to water the orchard. It does not entail that there will only be a single spring there. Consequently, Sūrah Dahr mentions multiple springs and their distributaries; however, the nature of these blessings, as is explained above, will be entirely different. There is no contradiction between these two statements.

فِيهَا سُرُرٌ مَرْفُوعَةٌ (١٣) وَأَكْوَابٌ مَوْضُوعَةٌ (١٤) وَنَمَارِقُ مَصْفُوفَةٌ (١٥) وَزَرَّائِبُ مَبْنُوتَةٌ^٨ (١٦)

These verses mention what will be available to the dwellers of Paradise for their comfort and luxurious living. Various *sūrahs* mention various

6. Where they will hear no useless talk.

7. In it, there will be a running spring.

8. In it, there will be thrones set high, and goblets well-arranged, and carpets well set out, and cushions spread all over.

details of this. In most cases, this difference relates to brevity and its elaboration; however, in some instances, it also takes into account the difference in status of the dwellers of Paradise. Moreover, while reading them, one should also keep in mind that this description is in the form of parables and an unseen world can only be described through parables and for this the only option is to borrow words from the language and culture the addressees are generally aware of.

The expression *سُرُرٌ مَّرْفُوعَةٌ* shows that the dwellers of Paradise will sit on lofty thrones. This mention is in accordance with the kings and nobles of Arabia at that time. However, Paradise will be according to what each of its dwellers desires. He will find it embellished to his taste and wishes.

In the expression *أَكْوَابٌ مَوْضُوعَةٌ* the word *أَكْوَابٌ* is the plural of *كُوبٌ* which is the same as “a cup”. It is used alike for a cup, a mug and goblet. The word *مَوْضُوعَةٌ* means “well-arranged”.

The word *نَمَارِقٌ مَصْفُوفَةٌ* in *نَمَارِقٌ مَصْفُوفَةٌ* refers to carpets and rugs. The implication is that the sitting places of the dwellers of Paradise will have carpets arranged in a consecutive sequence and they will be adjacent to one another. There will be no empty space.

The word *زُرِّيَّةٌ* in *زُرِّيَّةٌ مَبْثُوتَةٌ* is the plural of *زُرِّيَّةٌ*. It refers to pillows and cushions. The implication is that pillows and cushions will be scattered all over the carpets. They will act as comfortable seats to them wherever they want to sit. Today, sofas are in vogue; however, they too are decked with cushions.

أَفَلَا يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَى الْإِبِلِ كَيْفَ خُلِقَتْ (١٧) وَإِلَى السَّمَاءِ كَيْفَ رُفِعَتْ (١٨) وَإِلَى الْجِبَالِ
كَيْفَ نُصِبَتْ (١٩) وَإِلَى الْأَرْضِ كَيْفَ سُطِحَتْ (٢٠)⁹

In these verses, people who were leading their lives while remaining indifferent to the reward and punishment of the Hereafter referred to above are cautioned. Their attention is directed to some very conspicuous signs in the world around them. They are urged to reflect on these signs which bear evidence to the attributes of providence, power, wisdom and majesty of the Almighty. So blatant is this evidence that any person who has even a slight inclination to accepting the truth cannot deny the reward and punishment of the Hereafter. The implication is that in the presence of these signs why are they still adamant in demanding to see some sign of punishment or the Day of Judgement itself in order to profess faith in the

9. Do they not see the camels, how they have been made? And do they not behold the sky, how it has been raised high? And do they not look at the mountains, how they have been set aloft? And do they not see the earth, how it has been spread out

Prophet (sws).

Their attention is directed foremost to the camel. Why don't they reflect on something which is their everyday companion; it remains with them wherever they go and serves all their needs. It is completely obedient to them and even risks its life for them. It is the Almighty who has created it with all these wondrous qualities. The camel is an example of docility to man and in spite of being so huge and massive, people can lead it anywhere by a nose-string. It walks behind them in total compliance. It is their companion at home and during travels. It carries all their burdens and is like a ship for them in desert journeys. For weeks, it fights thirst and hunger and fills its stomach with thorny bushes and never disobeys its master however tough the errand assigned. Its flesh, hide and milk are of use to his master and even his faeces have their benefit. What needs to be reflected upon is: did the camel with such multifarious benefits come into existence of its own accord and was it mere coincidence that man tamed it into submission? Or was it that the Almighty created it through His profound power and wisdom and put it in the service of man? Obviously, sense and reason vouch for the second of these possibilities. If this second possibility is the only acceptable one, then is it not the responsibility of man to lead his life while remaining grateful to the Almighty. For it is the Almighty Who blessed him with these comforts of life even though it was not his right. If he does not show gratitude, he should get ready to face the Almighty and be held accountable before him and face punishment for denying all His favours.

It should be kept in consideration that a camel has been mentioned because certain of its characteristics alluded to above. The purpose is to remind man of all the animals which the Almighty has put into his service and on which depend his livelihood. At other places, the Qur'ān has also named these animals and the purpose of this mention is to make man realize that every favour entails gratitude to its bestower. An obvious outcome of this is that it is essential that a day come when the grateful are rewarded for their gratefulness and the ungrateful are punished for their ungratefulness. In the *tafsīr* of Sūrah 'Ādiyāt, this issue shall be discussed at length.

Consider now the verse: *وَالِى السَّمَاءِ كَيْفَ رُفِعَتْ* (and do they not behold the sky, how it has been raised high?!). Since the purpose, as referred to earlier, is to mention prominent signs, once an animal as tall as the camel was mentioned, attention was immediately directed to the heavens: Why don't people reflect on how its roof was raised high? The implication is that such a limitless expanse was raised high without any pillars. Even stranger is the fact that the time which has elapsed on it is also unknown but the most competent of engineers with the most powerful of

telescopes is unable to point to any minutest flaw in it. Even more weird is the fact that no one knows how far off it is from the earth; however, the sun, the moon, the planets and the stars suspended in it provide light and heat to the earth and are a means of sustaining life on it and are a source of its embellishment too.

Man should reflect that if such is the extent of the power and wisdom of the Creator that He can make the heavens, will it be difficult for Him to re-create man once he is reduced to dust? Consequently, at a number of places, the Qur'ān has asked man whether re-creating him is more difficult or creating the heavens.

Consider now the verse: *وَالِىَ الْجِبَالِ كَيْفَ نُصِبَتْ* (and do they not look at the mountains, how they have been set?) After the eyes are urged to observe the sky and its majesty, they are exhorted to look at the earth and attention is directed at the most prominent sign of God's power and wisdom that lies between the sky and the earth: the mountains. They maintain the balance of the earth lest it should tilt on one side together with everyone. They also control the winds and the clouds so that they cause rain at certain places in accordance with the will and wisdom of God. Even though they are made of rocks, providence has made provisions of streams and rivulets of water to flow from them for the benefit of the creation. They contain countless treasures of priceless worth hidden within them. Man is constantly in the process of discovering these treasures and using them for the development of the society. Among them are mountains which are insurmountable; however, the Almighty has taken out passes and passages through them so that they do not cause hindrance in communication between people of various nations. Man should reflect that is not all this a testimony to the great power and wisdom of the Creator and to His all-embracing providence. He should further deliberate that will the Creator Who has such attributes leave man unaccountable for all his deeds; will He not bring a Day in which He holds everyone accountable for his deeds and reward and punish people accordingly? Is not this reward and punishment an obvious requirement of His providence and wisdom? Can anyone claim that this is beyond His power?

Consider next the verse *وَالِىَ الْأَرْضِ كَيْفَ سُطِحَتْ* (and do they not see the earth, how it has been spread out?). The eyes are now directed from the mountains to the earth. Man should see how it contains various things in each and every place to nurture and nourish him. They are able to make houses in its outspread lands. Its fields contain their crops and orchards. Its springs, wells and rivulets supply water to these crops and orchards. Its forests and valleys contain limitless resources to feed their animals

and livestock. Man should reflect on all this and think that the Being Who has placed them in a house that He has built for them and which very efficiently caters for all their needs, will He become indifferent to the way these inhabitants lead their lives? Will He not differentiate those among them who lead their lives according to His will and who show pride and vanity by considering all these favours as an inheritance received from their forefathers. Intellect, obviously, endorses the fact that He should deal differently with the two categories. If He does not do so, then this would, God forbid, mean that either He is insensitive and unintelligent and devoid of the awareness of good and evil or is absolutely helpless and feeble. However, the being whose signs of power, wisdom, providence and glory one has witnessed and which are alluded to in these verses can neither be regarded as someone who is unaware or someone who has no sense of honour; similarly, He can also not be regarded as someone who is powerless and helpless. When this is a fact, then it shall have to be believed that by settling these inhabitants in this house, He wants to test and try them. One day, the period of time allotted for this trial will end and He will gather all mankind and show them the good and bad deeds that they did. Those who would have led their lives in accordance with His wishes will be blessed with His favours and those who created disorder will be punished for their misdeeds.

The questions posed in the words *كَيْفَ خُلِقَتْ* (how it has been created) and *كَيْفَ رُفِعَتْ* (how it has been raised high) are very terse and brief. Other *sūrahs* of the Qur'ān elaborate upon this brevity. The explanation afforded above is actually in the light shed by these *sūrahs* and has been limited to what was essential for the explanation of this *sūrah*. If someone wants to study all the claims which the Qur'ān makes by citing the above mentioned things as evidence, he would need to study all the verses of the Qur'ān where the sky, earth, mountains and camels are mentioned in some way.

The sequence of the discourse is also very unique here. It combines both ascending and descending order sequences. The purpose, we have indicated above, is to direct one's attention to some prominent signs so that the stubborn are left with no excuse. Thus the most conspicuous of things in close proximity is the camel whose benefits no one among the addressees could have denied. After this, attention is directed to the sky and then when it was to be directed to the earth since mountains lie in between, attention was focused on them. After the mountains, focusing attention to the out-stretched earth creates a natural attraction in it.

Two of these signs, the camel and the earth, are prominent with regard

to providence and two others, the sky and the mountains, are prominent with regard to God's power and wisdom. On these attributes of the Creator rests the philosophy of the Hereafter and the reward and punishment one will encounter in it. We have alluded to these aspects at various places in this *tafsīr*.

فَذَكِّرْ إِنَّمَا أَنْتَ مُذَكِّرٌ (٢١) لَسْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ بِمُصَيِّرٍ (٢٢)¹⁰

After a citation of arguments to substantiate the warnings sounded by the Qur'ān, the discourse shifts and addresses the Prophet (sws); he is assured that those who are denying his warnings are not doing so because his warnings are not well-substantiated, for signs and arguments in their favour are numerous all around them; the fact of the matter is that they are of benefit only to those who have fear of God. In the previous *sūrah*, such people are referred by the words: سَيَذَكِّرُ مَنْ يَخْشَى (٨٧: ١٠) (he who has fear will benefit from it, (87:10)). As far as people whose hearts have hardened are concerned, they will not be able to benefit from these signs. They are referred to by the words, وَيَتَجَنَّبُهَا الْأَشَقَى (٨٧: ١١) (and the wretched will evade it (87:11)) in the previous *sūrah*. The implication is that the Prophet (sws) should continue to preach and remind them irrespective of the consequences and rest assured that his responsibility is only to preach and remind people. It is not his responsibility that he should necessarily be able to make them accept faith. God has sent him to remind people and He will not be responsible if his addressees do not embrace faith.

إِلَّا مَنْ تَوَلَّى وَكَفَرَ (٢٣) فَيُعَذِّبُهُ اللَّهُ الْعَذَابَ الْأَكْبَرَ (٢٤)¹¹

Before the particle of exception إِلَّا an ellipsis of some words has occurred which can be determined through contextual indications. If these suppressed words are unfolded, the whole discourse would be something to the effect: "Those who are blessed with the urge for guidance, will benefit from your message; as for those who turn away and deny, the Almighty will gravely punish them."

The expression الْعَذَابَ الْأَكْبَرَ refers to the torment of Hell which will be the greatest among the torments of this world. No other torment of this world can rival it neither in extent nor in perpetuation. In the previous *sūrah*, this torment is called النَّارُ الْكُبْرَى (the great fire); however, there is no difference in meaning between the two.

10. Just remind them, for your duty is only to remind them; you are not to force them.

11. As for he who turns away and denies, God will punish him gravely.

إِنَّ إِلَيْنَا إِيَابَهُمْ (٢٥) ثُمَّ إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا حِسَابَهُمْ (٢٦)¹²

The implication of these verses is that no one should make the mistake of thinking that what has been said above is merely a threat; on the contrary, it is an indubitable reality. It is to God that everyone will return and to no one else and it is incumbent upon God to take account and reward or punish people accordingly. If the Almighty does not do so, then this will mean that this world is merely a playground of children and a meaningless and purposeless creation whereas the fact of the matter is that its Creator does nothing which is bereft of wisdom.

With the blessing of God, I come to the end of the *tafsīr* of this *sūrah*. وهو الموفق للخير والسداد (it is only He who impels a person to virtue and to what is right).

11th November, 1979 AD
20th Dhū al-Hijjah, 1399 AH
Lahore

(Translated from *Tadabbur-i Qur'ān* by Shehzad Saleem)

12. Indeed, to Us will they return. Then it is upon Us to call them to account.

Sūrah Fajr

Central Theme and Relationship with the Preceding *Sūrah*

The previous *sūrah*, while directing our attention to certain signs and phenomena found in the heavens and the earth, ended on the note that no one can deny the immense power and wisdom and the infinite providence of the Almighty who has created all this. The purpose is to bring to the fore the fact that when He possesses great power and wisdom and has also generously provided for humanity in all spheres, then these attributes of His entail that He bring a day in which He calls to account people who were blessed with favours and still swindled others and reward people who led a life of obedience and gratitude to Him. If He does not do this, then this is not only against His mercy and providence but also against His power and wisdom.

After this, the Prophet (sws) has been assured that the heavens and the earth are replete with signs and indications of what he is informing people. His only responsibility is to warn them through these signs even if they are not able to see them. He cannot guide the blind.

Here in this *sūrah*, some important events and incidents from the history and surroundings of the Quraysh are presented before them to prove to them that the reins of everything in this world are in the hands of the Almighty. He gives respite to whomsoever He wants for as long as He wants to and pulls the strings whenever He desires. Nothing can dare exceed the limits prescribed for it. Similar is His dealing with nations. The respite they have to thrive in this world is due to His permission and when they are seized, it is at His behest. He is in control of all nations. He is testing whether blessing someone with favours makes him grateful or conceited and whether depriving someone of favours makes him steadfast or frustrated. The first attitude guarantees eternal success and the second eternal failure. He shall be counted among the blessed servants of God who returned to Him with a peaceful soul. Neither favours made him proud nor the trial of poverty disturbed him. His Lord will be happy with him and he will be happy with his Lord.

Analysis of the *Sūrah*

Following is the analysis of the meanings of the *sūrah*:

Verses (1-5): Certain phenomena of this world are alluded to which testify

that the reins of everything in this world are in the hands of the Almighty. He gives respite to a thing to the extent He wants to and pulls the reins whenever He desires. Nothing can dare cross or fall short of the limits He has prescribed for it.

Verses (6-14): The fate of certain great nations of the world is cited to substantiate the fact that their reins are also in the hands of God. When they wrongly use their freedom to exercise their will and cross the limits set for them by the Almighty, they are given respite till a specific time; after this time expires, they are seized and are seized so strongly that in spite of all their power and glory, they are helpless before it.

Verses (15-20): A reference to the misguided behaviour of man: when he is blessed with favours, he thinks that this was his right and erroneously believes that God regards him to be a person of high status and that is why he has been honoured with such favours. Similarly, if he is deprived of favours, he thinks that God has not valued him. The truth of the matter is that whether a person is blessed with favours or deprived of them is something which is governed by the Almighty's law of trial. In the first case, the Almighty wants to see whether a person after being blessed with favours becomes grateful to Him and fulfils the rights of his fellow human beings or ends up proud and conceited and usurps the rights of others. In the second case, the Almighty wants to see whether a person is content and happy with what the Almighty has apportioned for him or despairs before the Almighty and shows despondency and timidity. The fact is that instead of complaining to the Almighty, he should take a look at his own deeds: how should he have behaved with the orphans and the poor after receiving the favours of the Almighty and how he actually behaved with them after being infatuated with the love of wealth.

Verses (21-26): A portrayal of the helplessness and hopelessness on the Day of Judgement of people who remained inebriated with the love of wealth and could not make their wealth a means of their salvation.

Verses (27-30): A portrayal of the prosperity and success of people who remained content and resigned to the will of the Almighty in the vicissitudes of life: if they were blessed with favours, they became grateful to the Almighty and duly carried out their responsibilities towards their fellow human beings, and if they were tested with trying circumstances, then instead of despairing and losing hope, they showed patience and resolve and expressed contentment on what the Almighty ordained for them.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَالْفَجْرِ (١) وَلَيْلٍ عَشْرِ (٢) وَالشَّفْعِ وَالْوَتْرِ (٣) وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا يَسْرِ (٤) هَلْ فِي ذَلِكَ قَسَمٌ لِّذِي
حِجْرِ (٥) أَلَمْ تَرَى كَيْفَ فَعَلَ رَبُّكَ بِعَادٍ (٦) إِرَمَ ذَاتِ الْعِمَادِ (٧) الَّتِي لَمْ يُخْلَقْ مِثْلُهَا فِي
الْبِلَادِ (٨) وَثُمُودَ الَّذِينَ جَابُوا الصَّخَرَ بِالْوَادِي (٩) وَفِرْعَوْنَ ذِي الْأَوْتَادِ (١٠) الَّذِينَ طَعَوْا فِي
الْبِلَادِ (١١) فَأَكْثَرُوا فِيهَا الْفَسَادَ (١٢) فَصَبَّ عَلَيْهِمْ رَبُّكَ سَوْطَ عَذَابٍ (١٣) إِنَّ رَبَّكَ
لَبِالْمُرْصَادِ (١٤) فَأَمَّا الْإِنْسَانُ إِذَا مَا ابْتَلَاهُ رَبُّهُ فَأَكْرَمَهُ وَنَعَّمَهُ فَيَقُولُ رَبِّي أَكْرَمَنِ (١٥) وَأَمَّا
إِذَا مَا ابْتَلَاهُ فَقَدَرَ عَلَيْهِ رِزْقَهُ فَيَقُولُ رَبِّي أَهَانَنِ (١٦) كَلَّا بَلْ لَا تَكْفُرُونَ الْيَتِيمَ (١٧) وَلَا
تَحَاضُّونَ عَلَى طَعَامِ الْمِسْكِينِ (١٨) وَتَأْكُلُونَ الثَّرَاثَ أَكْلًا لَّمًّا (١٩) وَتُحِبُّونَ الْمَالَ حُبًّا جَمًّا
(٢٠) كَلَّا إِذَا دُكَّتِ الْأَرْضُ دَكًّا دَكًّا (٢١) وَجَاءَ رَبُّكَ وَالْمَلَكُ صَفًّا صَفًّا (٢٢) وَجِيءَ يَوْمَئِذٍ
بِجَهَنَّمَ يَوْمَئِذٍ يَتَذَكَّرُ الْإِنْسَانُ وَأَنَّى لَهُ الذِّكْرَى (٢٣) يَقُولُ يَالَيْتَنِي قَدَّمْتُ لِحَيَاتِي (٢٤)
فَيَوْمَئِذٍ لَا يُعَذِّبُ عَذَابَهُ أَحَدٌ (٢٥) وَلَا يُوثِقُ وِثْقَهُ أَحَدٌ (٢٦) يَأْتِيهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُظْمِئَةُ
(٢٧) ارْجِعِي إِلَى رَبِّكَ رَاضِيَةً مَرْضِيَّةً (٢٨) فَادْخُلِي فِي عِبَادِي (٢٩) وَادْخُلِي جَنَّتِي (٣٠)

In the name of Allah, the most Gracious, the ever Merciful.

The dawn bears evidence, and the ten nights and the even and the odd and the night when it begins to leave. Is there in this an evidence for a sensible [person]? (1-5)

Did you not see what your Lord did with the ‘Ād! – the Iram of the pillars – who had no parallel in the lands. And with the Thamūd who carved rocks in the valley! And with the Pharaoh, he of the pegs! These people were rebellious in their lands and spread great evil therein. So your Lord let loose on them the lash of His punishment – Indeed, your Lord is in ambush. (6-14)

But as for man, when his Lord tests him by honouring him and bestowing favours on him, he says: “My Lord has raised my majesty.” And when He tests him and reduces his living resources, he says: “My Lord has humiliated me.” Certainly not! In fact you do not show kindness to the orphans and do not urge one another to feed the poor and grab hold of the inheritance and devour it and are infatuated with the love of wealth. (15-20)

Certainly not! They should remember the day when the earth shall be pounded even, and your Lord shall appear in the company of the angels

standing in rows and Hell shall be brought near. On that Day, man shall come to think. But then what will this thinking avail him? He will say: "Ah! Would that I had done something for my life!" Thus, on that Day, none shall punish as He punishes and none shall bind as He binds. (21-26)

O you whose heart remained firmly attached [with his Lord] proceed towards your Lord such that He is pleased with you and you are pleased with Him. Enter among My servants and enter My Paradise. (27-30)

Explanation

وَالْفَجْرِ (١) وَلَيَالٍ عَشْرٍ (٢) وَالشَّفْعِ وَالْوَتْرِ (٣) وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا يَسْرِ (٤)¹

I have already explained in the introduction to the *sūrah* that the oaths sworn by here are meant to substantiate the claim that the real schemer of this world is God, the one and only. In His hands are the reins of everything. It is He Who brings forth everything and it is He Who makes them disappear. It is He Who grants respite to something for as long as He wants to and it is He Who pulls its strings whenever He intends to. Nothing can dare cross the limits He has prescribed for it or intervene in His authority.

The word فَجْر refers to the time when the darkness of the night disappears and the light of the day appears from the horizon. While mentioning the directives of the fast, the Qur'ān says: وَكُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا حَتَّىٰ يَتَبَيَّنَ لَكُمُ الْخَيْطُ الْأَبْيَضُ مِنَ الْخَيْطِ الْأَسْوَدِ مِنَ الْفَجْرِ (٢: ١٨٧) (and eat and drink until the white thread of the dawn is totally evident to you from the black thread of night, (2:187)). In contrast to فَجْر (dawn), its synonym صُبْح (morning) refers to the time which not only encompasses the time of فَجْر (dawn) but also the time after sunrise. For this reason, when an oath is sworn by the word صُبْح (morning), it is qualified by a phrase. Thus for example: (٨١: ٨١) وَالصُّبْحُ إِذَا تَنَفَّسَ (the morning bears witness when it breathes, (81:18)) and (٧٤: ٣٤) وَالصُّبْحُ إِذَا أَسْفَرَ (the morning bears witness when it appears, (74:34)).

Once it is ascertained that the word فَجْر refers to that time of commencement of the morning when the night just disappears, the oaths sworn here are of the same sort as those of the following: (٧٤: ٢٣-٣٤) وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا أَدْبَرَ لِإِحْدَى الْكُبَرِ (the night bears witness when it turns its back and the morning when it appears that [this Day of Judgement] is from among great incidents, (74:32-34)).

I have already explained in the *tafsīr* of Sūrah Muddaththir that when the darkness of the nights is spread deep, there is no sign of morning. The

1. The dawn bears evidence, and the ten nights and the even and the odd and the night when it begins to leave.

time of *fajr* brings the message of a great change: darkness disappears and the world puts on a new garb. Same shall be the case with the Day of Judgement. This world is like the night whose darkness has enshrouded the dawn of the Day of Judgement. Just as the dawn appears at a fixed time after the night, similarly a time will come when the Day of Judgement will suddenly appear. At that time, everyone will see that what they deemed an impossibility is staring them in the eye.

Here, through the oath sworn by *fajr*, the Qur'ān has cautioned that the time of dawn symbolically portrays the advent of the Day of Judgement every day. Just as a person sleeps at night and gets up in the morning rubbing his eyes, in a similar manner, a time will come after death when the trumpet shall be sounded and he will get up in the dawn of the Day of Judgement and will feel as if he had just gone to sleep and gotten up. Thus he should not consider the advent of the Day of Judgement to be a far-fetched reality. In Ḥadīth narratives, the supplication which is taught to a person when he gets up in the morning also refers to this aspect.²

What are the ten nights referred to by the words *وَلَيَالٍ عَشْرٍ* (and the ten nights)? Our exegetes have given different answers to this question; however, none of them offers convincing arguments in favour of his view. All of them are based on the notion that it is essential that the objects and phenomena which are sworn by in the Qur'ān be sacred. This notion is absolutely baseless. Most oaths sworn in the Qur'ān are meant to substantiate a claim. Instead of finding the element of sanctity in them, one should look at their argumentative nature: one should first determine the claim which is under discussion and how an oath bears evidence to it. Moreover, verses and instances in the Qur'ān should be kept in consideration which discuss the subject in the same or similar words.

If one reflects on the central theme of the *sūrah*, what is in harmony with it is the fact that these ten nights refer to the ten nights of the waxing and the waning of the moon. Since the expression *لَيَالٍ عَشْرٍ* is not defined by the article *alif lām*, they can simultaneously refer to the ten nights in which the moon waxes and the ten in which it wanes. In other words, this oath depicts the gradual picture of the rising and setting of the moon. In simpler words, this subject is discussed in Sūrah Yāsīn thus:

وَالْقَمَرَ قَدَرْنَا مَنَازِلَ حَتَّىٰ عَادَ كَالْعُرْجُونِ الْقَدِيمِ (٣٩:٣٦)

2. The words of a typical text are: *الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي أَحْيَانَا بَعْدَ مَا أَمَاتَنَا وَإِلَيْهِ النُّشُورُ* (gratitude be to God who brought us back to life after he had made us die and towards Him is the return). (Bukhārī, *Al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ*, 3rd ed., vol. 5 (Beirut: Dār ibn Kathīr, 1987), 2326, (no. 5953).

We have ordained phases for the moon, until [after passing through these phases] it appears like a withered twig of a date-palm. (36:39)

In this verse, the moon is portrayed as if it is an obedient camel whose reins are in the hands of a divine impeller who makes it ascend to a certain height in various steps and then from there makes it descend in various steps so much so that this tiring journey transforms it into a withered thorn.

This aspect is explained thus in the style of an oath:

وَالْقَمَرَ إِذَا اتَّسَقَ لَتَرْكَبُنَّ طَبَقًا عَنْ طَبَقٍ (٨٤: ١٨-١٩)

And the moon bears witness when it reaches full completion that you also shall ascend gradually. (84:18-19)

Here those who are demanding to be immediately shown the Day of Judgement are told that there is a fixed program and a gradual process for the manifestation of the signs of the Almighty. The Day of Judgement is an obvious requirement of the Almighty's justice. It shall definitely come but shall come at its appointed time.

In the light of these parallels from the Qur'ān itself, if this verse is analyzed, one comes to the conclusion that here the Qur'ān has referred to each of the ten nights in which the transformations in the moon are very prominent and it appears to be different each day. This transformation bears evidence that the Almighty has prescribed a gradual course for the appearance of all His signs and manifestations. A lady gives birth to a child after a specific period of time and a crop becomes ready for harvest after a set time passes. The Almighty does not seize the disbelievers immediately after their crimes: He gives them respite and once this period of respite is over, only then He seizes them. On similar lines, this world also is gradually moving to its destination which is the Day of Judgement, and this will be exactly according to the timetable which the Almighty has ordained for it.

In the verse وَالشَّفْعِ وَالْوَتْرِ, the word الشَّفْعِ means even and the word الْوَتْرِ means "odd". What then do these meanings imply? There are so many opinions which our exegetes have cited in response to this question that it is difficult to list them comprehensively. In my opinion, the reason for these multiple opinions is that instead of keeping the context and coherence of the discourse in consideration, people have tried to make these words imply sacred things only. Had they viewed these oaths not as those sworn by sacred things but as presenting evidence on a claim, the correct and easier way of deliberation was to analyze those portions of the Qur'ān where it has mentioned the creation of all things in pairs

and has directed our attention to some very important facts of wisdom. At one place, it is said: (۴۹:۵۱) وَمِنْ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقْنَا زَوْجَيْنِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ (and from all things We have made pairs so that you may take heed, (51:49)).

Each pair comes into existence through combination of two odd numbered entities. This, in other words, means that every entity is odd from one aspect and even from another. While referring to this fact, the Qur'ān has directed our attention to many paired-phenomena of this world: the earth and the sky, darkness and light, shade and sunshine, male and female species. After this, it has reminded us of some very important consequences as is alluded to by the words: لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ (so that you may take heed). For example, a reminder of the fact that when each and every object is incomplete when taken alone and becomes meaningful and complete when viewed with its counterpart, then this means that there definitely exists a perfect and flawless being beyond these varied objects whose wisdom and power creates harmony and concord between them and makes them meaningful. It is essential that this being be perfect and flawless. If there is any shortcoming in this being, then he will become dependent for his needs on something which is superior and this process will go on indefinitely. A second thing which these words remind us is that this world viewed collectively has certain voids in it just as all its constituents have certain voids and these voids are not filled unless one acknowledges a Day of Judgement. And if one does not acknowledge the coming of such a day, then this world cannot be considered to have been made by a wise being; it becomes a recreational activity of a merrymaker and what a cruel recreation it is!

The mention of the even and the odd comes after the ten nights and these ten nights constitute the nights in which the moon waxes and wanes. This waxing and waning of the moon bears witness that the reins of all things are in the hands of God, the one and only. This is because in some months these nights are odd in number and in others they are even and no one has the power to make the odd ones even and the even ones odd however much he may want this to happen. People try their utmost to be able to see the moon of 'id on the twenty ninth day of the previous month; it however obeys only its Lord in this matter and disregards the passion and fervour of people to welcome it as soon as possible.

وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا يَسْرِ³

Here at the end, the testimony of the night is presented and it is qualified by the words إِذَا يَسْرِ which focus our attention to that time when

3. and the night when it begins to leave.

the night just starts to depart and the signs of dawn start to appear on the horizon. If one reflects on this in the light shed by parallel verses of the Qur'ān, it reminds us of some very important facts.

Firstly, a reminder of the fact that all the elements of this world are subservient to the Almighty. When the night comes, so great and all-embracing is its hold that there seems no possibility for the day to appear; however, there does come a time when a white strip of light appears in this darkness and very soon dominates the night in such a manner that the sun appears and with it darkness disappears. Night does not have the power to stop this transformation.

Secondly, the disappearance of night and the appearance of the day symbolizes the advent of the Day of Judgement for people who think that this Day is a far-fetched reality. We have already explained this aspect in detail.

Thirdly, it is a reminder for people who think that even if the Day of Judgement is to come, it is naive to remain fearful of it since it is far off – a reminder that this world has come as near its fate as the time which lapses between the time of daybreak and the appearance of the first rays of light which end the darkness of night. Man views these phenomena from his narrow vision and measures them from the seconds and minutes of his world. He is unable to understand that this world which has been providing for man and all kinds of beasts and animals will one day have to encounter a calamity which will totally destroy it. However, in the system set up by the Almighty matters are totally different; He is seeing the Day of Judgement at the heels of this world. According to His system of measurement, the Day of Judgement is about to come. While referring to this fact, the Prophet (sws) is reported to have said: “I and the Day of Judgement are so near each other as two adjacent fingers are.”⁴

Moreover, the words إِذَا يَسَّرُ subtly convey the fact that no trial should be considered a calamity which will remain forever. Just as a person witnesses the time of dawn and the disappearance of the night after its advent and observes that the Almighty only lets either of them to stay till the time that it is essential for the welfare of this world; similarly, the trials which come in the form of happiness and sorrow, ease and hardship are meant for the mental and moral instruction and training of a person and the Almighty only allows these trials to prevail as much as they are necessary for the training and instruction of a person. People should not become frustrated because of such trials nor run away from them; they should in fact face them with gratitude and perseverance and should keep hoping that hidden under every trial is some good for them.

4. Al-Bukhārī, *Al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 5, 2385, (no. 6140).

Further deliberation on the first four verses shows that the oaths وَالْفَجْرِ and وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا يَسْرِ are contrasting to one another and the two middle oaths وَالشَّفْعِ وَالْوَتْرِ and وَلَيَالٍ عَشْرٍ relate to two great phenomena which bear evidence to the claim referred to in the beginning and which lie in between the two contrasting elements. Since the first and last oaths occupy primary significance in these group of verses and the other two oaths are secondary in nature, thus in order to complete this discussion, I deem it necessary to restate the claims on which the Qur'ān has borne testimony on the basis of such contrasting elements of nature as day and night and darkness and light.

Firstly, the Qur'ān has substantiated the belief of monotheism on the basis of the contrasting elements and shown that though apparently this world in every part of it is a battlefield of conflicting elements of nature and a natural corollary of this is that it should not have even come into existence and even if it were able to, it should have been destroyed; however, a deep reflection shows that these conflicting elements have great harmony and accord between them. It is because of this harmony that these contrasting elements through mutual interaction and cooperation produce very conducive results which in fact guarantee the existence of this world.

The question arises: Who creates harmony between these conflicting elements? The only correct answer to this question is: a wise and all-knowing, powerful and sovereign being who is beyond these conflicting elements creates harmony between them and with appropriate proportion engenders concurrence and unity among them, and then makes them produce conducive results which are essential for the existence and sustenance of this world; moreover, this Being is necessarily one and only because if there were others besides him then there would have been a clash between His will and theirs and this world would have been annihilated. At one place, the Qur'ān refers to this aspect by the words: (لَوْ كَانَ فِيهِمَا آلِهَةٌ إِلَّا اللَّهُ لَفَسَدَتَا (٢٢:٢١) (Were there other gods in heaven or earth besides God, both heaven and earth would have been ruined, (21:22)).

Secondly, the Qur'ān has substantiated the Day of Judgement through these contrasting elements. Briefly put, the argument of the Qur'ān runs as follows: the Almighty has created everything in pairs and every thing reaches its culmination together with its counterpart. Without it, neither does it reach its culmination nor without it can there be any comprehensible justification of its own existence. In fact, there appears to be a void and an element of incompleteness in it because of which every discerning person would regard it to be a meaningless creation. A

little deliberation would lead us to the same conclusion about this world also: if this world is not viewed together with the next, one will find void and incompleteness in it. We find a fierce scuffle going on in it between good and evil and justice and oppression. A natural consequence of this should be that there should come a day of justice in which the Lord of the worlds, with full authority, control and knowledge take account from people and then reward His good people and punish those who spread disorder in this world. If, without this day of accountability, this world keeps going on and then one day end, then this would mean that good and evil are alike in the eyes of the Creator and that the creation of this world has no wisdom behind it: it is rather a purposeless creation and the playground of a merry-maker. Consequently, on this very basis, those who have denied the Day of Judgement are asked: أَفَتَجْعَلُ الْمُسْلِمِينَ كَالْمُجْرِمِينَ مَا لَكُمْ كَيْفَ تَحْكُمُونَ (٣٦-٣٥: ٦٨) (are We to treat alike the obedient and the criminals? What has come over you that you should judge so ill? (68:35-36). Readers may take a look at the explanation of oath verses of Sūrah Muddaththir for further discussion of this topic.

Thirdly, the Almighty has explained the fact that just as for the maintenance and development of man's material being, the light and heat of the day is essential as are the darkness and coldness of the night, similarly for disciplining and training his moral and spiritual being, it is essential that he be made to pass through hardship and ease, discomfort and comfort, good health and disease. This would train him to be patient and express gratitude to the Almighty and he would become worthy of being blessed with what is stated thus in Sūrah Fajr: رَاضِيَةً مَرْضِيَّةً (٢٨: ٨٩) (they will be happy with their Lord and their Lord will be happy with them, (89:28)). The Qur'ān has mentioned this wisdom behind such circumstances at various places. It is elaborated upon further down in this *sūrah* as well and will also be discussed in the *tafsīr* of the initial verses of Sūrah Duḥā.

Fourthly, the Almighty has not let these conflicting elements unrestrained. The reins of each object of this world are in His hands. Nothing can dare exceed the limits prescribed for it. Every object by its existence bears witness that it is not free to do whatever it likes: it is subservient to the will of God. When the night comes, it does not stay forever and deprive the creatures of God from the light of the day and the heat of the sun; in fact, it must pack up and leave at exactly the time appointed for it and make way for the light of the day. Similarly, if the sun rises at a particular time, it must set at a prescribed time. It cannot stay forever and deprive us from the serene and cool night. These observations are made by every person and this is an obvious testimony to the fact that

every object of this world is in God's control. It is He who releases and restrains it and it is He who sets it free. An obvious corollary of this is that after witnessing the respite of the Almighty no one, however much powerful he may be should vainly reckon that he is beyond His control. When the sun, the moon, the night and the day are not beyond His control, what mettle does man have to escape His control. This topic is discussed in the Qur'ān in various styles. In Sūrah Qaṣaṣ, it is stated:

قُلْ أَرَأَيْتُمْ إِنْ جَعَلَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْكُمُ اللَّيْلَ سَرْمَدًا إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ مَنْ إِلَهٌ غَيْرُ اللَّهِ يَأْتِيكُمْ بِضِيَاءٍ أَوْ لَا تَسْمَعُونَ قُلْ أَرَأَيْتُمْ إِنْ جَعَلَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْكُمُ النَّهَارَ سَرْمَدًا إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ مَنْ إِلَهٌ غَيْرُ اللَّهِ يَأْتِيكُمْ بِلَيْلٍ (٢٨: ٧١-٧٢)

Tell them: "If God should enforce night upon you perpetually till the Day of Judgement, what other god besides God could bring to you even a little light? Do you not hear?" Ask them: "If God should impose on you perpetual day until the Day of Judgement, what other god besides God could bring to you even a single night." (28:71-72)

In the oaths of this *sūrah*, this particular aspect is very prominent; hence, it should be specifically kept in consideration.

هَلْ فِي ذَلِكَ قَسَمٌ لِذِي حِجْرٍ⁵

The word *حِجْر* means "intellect". The literal meaning of the word *حِجْر* and the word *عَقْل* (intellect) is the same. Both contain the meaning of "stopping and tying up". In other words, intellect is an inner leash which restrains a person from doing things which are below his dignity. For this reason, it is also called *حِجْر*.

The interrogative style of the verse creates an aura of rebuke as well as communicating the truth in a decisive style. The implication is that when the Almighty has bestowed upon man a great blessing as intellect, it is only befitting for him to seek a lesson from the various signs scattered around him. These signs by their very existence are guiding man to the right path and destination; a person should thus not insist that he will only believe that those who had warned him were true in their claim when he is able to sight his destination. If he does believe at such a time, he will only end up yearning for what he cannot attain. This topic is also discussed further ahead in the *sūrah* in verses 23 and 24, where it shall be explained more.

5. Is there in this an evidence for a sensible [person]?

Communicating the truth in a decisive style here means that there are several signs to which attention has been focused but none of them could convince them. After this, those signs have been presented before them which are the most manifest and near them and contain a testimony in them for the sensible. However, these stubborn people will not benefit from them.

أَلَمْ تَرَى كَيْفَ فَعَلَ رَبُّكَ بِعَادٍ (٦) إِرَمَ ذَاتِ الْعِمَادِ (٧) الَّتِي لَمْ يُخْلَقْ مِثْلُهَا فِي الْبِلَادِ (٨)^٦

After pointing out the signs present in the world around man, attention is now focused on the history of some nations: history is also a witness to the fact that the Almighty does not remain indifferent to the attitude of the nations which rise in the world; He keeps observing them and lies in ambush for them. When such nations deviate from the right path, He does give them respite till a certain period of time governed by His wisdom; this time is granted to them so that they can mend their ways if they want to or live in this state till the appointed time. After that, He seizes them and seizes them in a manner that they are totally routed. This dealing of the Almighty shows that just as these nations have been called to account, the whole world also will be held accountable one day in which each and every individual will be held responsible for his deeds. Those who deserve reward, will be fully rewarded and those who deserve punishment will be accordingly dealt with.

The nation of ‘Ād has been mentioned in previous *sūrahs* in various aspects. Here they are mentioned with respect to Iram. The Iram are from among their forefathers from whom began great feats of construction and military development. It is evident from history that they belonged to that branch of the Semites which began with Iram ibn Sām ibn Nūh.

The word عِمَاد means “tall pillars”. This word actually symbolically refers to their great advancement in the field of construction just as the words وَجِفَانٍ كَالْجَوَابِ وَقُدُورٍ رَاسِيَاتٍ (١٣:٣٤) (basins as large as watering-troughs, and built-in cauldrons, (34:13)) symbolically refer to the generosity of Solomon (sws).

No doubt the ‘Ād were very advanced in the art of stone-carving. They had carved beautiful pavilions and castles from mountains. The affluent among them were particularly fond of constructing a monument at all high places. It is evident from the Qur’ān that Hūd, their prophet even admonished them on this wasteful and boastful pursuit of theirs.

The verse الَّتِي لَمْ يُخْلَقْ مِثْلُهَا فِي الْبِلَادِ refers to the fact that the ‘Ād was a

6. Did you not see what your Lord did with the ‘Ād! – the Iram of the pillars – who had no parallel in the lands.

very powerfully built and strong race. In this aspect, they surpassed all previous and contemporary nations.

وَتَمُودَ الَّذِينَ جَابُوا الصَّخْرَ بِالْوَادِي (٩)⁷

After the ‘Ād, the Thamūd are briefly referred to. They were from among the descendents of the ‘Ād and actually inherited from them their inclination towards the art of construction. For this very reason, they are also called ‘Ād, the second. They lived in the Wād al-Qurā’ (valley of the city). They had carved houses from the mountains of this valley, in the very way the ‘Ād had. The words جَابُوا الصَّخْرَ allude to this.

وَفِرْعَوْنَ ذِي الْأَوْتَادِ (١٠)⁸

After referring to the destruction of the ancient nations, the destruction of the Pharaoh and his armies is mentioned. The expression ذِي الْأَوْتَادِ means “he of the pegs”; actually the word أَوْتَاد symbolically refers to the armies of Pharaoh. Armies generally live in tents and these tents are generally fastened to the ground through pegs; for this reason, it is common to refer to armies in this manner in Arabic. The Torah also mentions the huge number of the Pharaoh’s army and the Qur’ān also refers to this large number in Sūrahs Yūnus, Tāhā, Qaṣaṣ and Dhāriyāt. In ancient times, armies were not formally kept by a state. At the time of an offensive or of defence, young men of various families and tribes would come forward and present their services and once the need was fulfilled, they would go back to their work. However, it is evident from the Torah that the Pharaoh had commissioned a formal standing army for the protection of his country. This army would keep patrolling various areas with its tents. He had even made it mandatory on his nobles and affluent people to maintain a certain number of horses, keep a certain quantity of weapons and chariots so that in times of need they could efficiently help the government. For this distinctive feature, the Pharaoh is called “he of the pegs”.

الَّذِينَ طَغَوْا فِي الْبِلَادِ (١١) فَأَكْثَرُوا فِيهَا الْفَسَادَ (١٢) فَصَبَّ عَلَيْهِمْ رَبُّكَ سَوْطَ عَذَابٍ (١٣)⁹

Mentioned in this verse is the behaviour these nations adopted after being blessed with the leadership of their country and various means and

7. And with the Thamūd who carved rocks in the valley!

8. And with the Pharaoh, he of the pegs!

9. These people were rebellious in their lands and spread great evil therein. So your Lord let loose on them the lash of His punishment.

resources: they became rebellious which in other words means that they became indifferent to God and became fearless of Him and were overcome with the conceited notion that whatever they have is because of their own ability and skill and they can use these favours in whatever manner they want to. Neither has anyone given them the status and position they have nor can anyone seize these from them nor are they accountable for these before anyone.

The verse *فَأَكْثَرُوا فِيهَا الْفَسَادَ* (and spread great evil therein) mentions the consequence of the rebelliousness mentioned above. After being overcome with pride and conceit, they deviated from the right path. They were driven by Satan and their base desires. As a result, evil spread in their individual and collective lives.

The verse *فَصَبَّ عَلَيْهِمْ رَبُّكَ سَوْطَ عَذَابٍ* (so your Lord let loose on them the lash of His punishment) mentions the consequence of the dominance of the evil they spread: when this evil pervaded all spheres of their lives, the Almighty as a result unleashed His punishment on them. The various forms of this punishment have already been alluded to in the previous *sūrahs*.

An established practice of the Almighty is that when He blesses a nation with political authority in a land, He does not leave it unaccountable. He continues to watch over it and sees if it is properly using this authority. If it uses it within the limits prescribed by the Almighty, it continues to enjoy exercising this authority. If, out of rebelliousness, it violates these limits, it is granted respite so that it mends its ways or that the truth is communicated to it in its ultimate form. If it does not benefit from this respite and its rebelliousness increases, the Almighty destroys it because its existence is neither beneficial for its own self nor for others. This decision of God is unalterable. When it is to be implemented, no nation, however much resourceful it may be, can stop or avert it. History bears evidence that the Almighty seized many a nation when they were at their zenith and crushed them into non-existence.

¹⁰ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَبِالْمِرْصَادِ (١٤)

This is the substance of all the oaths and historical anecdotes mentioned in the beginning of the *sūrah*. In other words, this verse is the *muqṣam* 'alayh with regard to its placement and context. The claim it makes is supported by the signs found around man as well as by historical anecdotes.

10. Indeed, your Lord is in ambush.

The word مِرْصَاد means “the place where one lies in ambush”. The implication is that the signs found around man as well as historical incidents bear witness that the Creator of this world has not distanced Himself from its affairs after creating it; in fact, He is watching over each and every thing. Nothing can dare hide itself from Him. The reins of everything are in His hands. If a nation resorts to rebelliousness, He does give it some respite; however, this respite is upto a specific period of time; once this period expires, the Almighty seizes it for its misdoings and no one has the power to liberate himself from His grasp.

This situation is a clear evidence to the fact that this world is not a place of amusement of a merry-maker. It is made by a wise and powerful being and is made with a purpose and meaning. The relationship He has with each and every object of this world and the law of the rise and fall of nations which He has enforced in this world show that there is a Day of Judgement which will necessarily come; on that day, a person who spent his life according to the directives of His Lord will be blessed with the pleasure of His Lord and a person who created disorder in this world thinking it to be a place of merrymaking will have to face punishment.

فَأَمَّا الْإِنْسَانُ إِذَا مَا ابْتَلَاهُ رَبُّهُ فَأَكْرَمَهُ وَنَعَّمَهُ فَيَقُولُ رَبِّي أَكْرَمَنِ (١٥) وَأَمَّا إِذَا مَا ابْتَلَاهُ فَقَدَرَ عَلَيْهِ رِزْقَهُ فَيَقُولُ رَبِّي أَهَانَنِ (١٦)¹¹

These verses mention the misconception which leads people who are blessed with favours into rebelliousness and those who are deprived of these favours into frustration and despair. This misconception is that people who are blessed with favours in this world think that they are very highly regarded by the Almighty and thus their Lord has raised their majesty. On the other hand, people who are deprived of these favours think that they have no worth in the eyes of God and hence they are left by Him to bear humiliations. The consequence of this misconception is that the first category of people is overcome by conceit and vanity and takes to rebelliousness and defiance and the second category of people is overcome with despair and despondency and either loses the will to live or resorts to various measures of chancing its fate which take it away from God and leave it to the mercy of Satan. The truth of the matter is that in this world whether a person is faced with favourable circumstances or with unfavourable ones, they are neither the result of the fact that he is valued by God nor a way to humiliate him; both these

11. But as for man, when his Lord tests him by honouring him and bestowing favours on him, he says: “My Lord has raised my majesty.” And when He tests Him and reduces his living resources, he says: “My Lord has humiliated me.”

circumstances are meant to test and try him. If the Almighty blesses someone with affluence, the purpose is to test whether that person shows gratitude and obedience to Him and lives in concern and helps out others or becomes conceited and regards others to be inferior. Similarly, if the Almighty ordains hardships for a person, the purpose is to test whether that person remains content on what has been ordained for him and shows resolve and determination to brave the storms of life or ends up in despair and frustration. On one's strength in showing gratitude and resolve depends one's strength in faith. Thus the Almighty continues to test him in both these spheres. He who is able to develop these two abilities in him is a person whose soul is at peace, which is an invaluable achievement and as the *sūrah* will mention at the end, such a person will be pleased with the Almighty and the Almighty will be pleased with him.

كَلَّا بَلْ لَا تُكْرِمُونَ الْيَتِيمَ (١٧) وَلَا تَحَاضُّونَ عَلَى طَعَامِ الْمِسْكِينِ (١٨) وَتَأْكُلُونَ
الْثَّرَاتِ أَكْلًا لَمًّا (١٩) وَتُحِبُّونَ الْمَالَ حُبًّا جَمًّا (٢٠)¹²

The previous verses mention a principle; however, here in these verses, the affluent leaders of Makkah and Tā'if are addressed directly and admonished. They are chided on their erroneous view that a person who is blessed with abundant wealth is actually held in regard by the Almighty. Such abundance is actually a trial and test for a person: they are tried to see whether after being bestowed with riches they show conceit or use them for the service and welfare of the orphans and the poor. It is very naïve and foolish of them to derive such an opposite conclusion. What was befitting for them was to express gratitude before the Almighty and serve the cause of the orphans and the poor and also urge others to do so; on the contrary, their wealth has made them proud; they regard the poor as inferior and desist from helping them.

The verse says that kindness should be shown to the orphans which means that the Almighty does not merely require of the affluent to spend on the orphans; the real requirement is that orphans should hold a respectable status in the society. Orphans should not be left at the mercy of adverse circumstances; people should honour and respect them; they should realize that the only value a person's wealth may have in the eyes of the Almighty is that it is used for the service and welfare of the orphans; otherwise this wealth will actually become a source of their humiliation and disgrace.

12. Certainly not! In fact you do not show kindness to the orphans and do not urge one another to feed the poor and grab hold of the inheritance and devour it and are infatuated with the love of wealth.

The word تَحَاضُّوْنَ means “to urge and exhort one another to something”. The implication is that in the matter of the orphans it is not merely required to feed them, it is required that the affluent lot of the society show enthusiasm for their welfare and urge others also in this regard. It should not be the case that neither they spend by themselves nor let others spend so that their own stinginess is concealed.

The word طَعَام (food) is used here in a broad sense and this usage is quite customary. The objective is to cater for all their needs.

In the verse وَتَأْكُلُونَ الثَّرَاكَ أَكْلًا لَّمَّا the word لَمَّ means “to gather and grab hold of something” and the word تَأْكُلُونَ means “to usurp wealth”. The implication is that they have become so infatuated with the love of wealth that the powerful and strong elements of their society grab the inheritance of people so that the weak amongst the heirs so much so even the children are deprived of their share. In the Arab *jāhiliyyah* also, though there was a prescribed way for the distribution of inheritance, however, just as in current times, influential elements of the society do not abstain from misappropriation and openly usurp the share of the weak heirs in spite of a clear directive of prohibition against this attitude in Islām, similarly, the influential elements of those times also had adopted a self-made rule as per which the person who was the most powerful would have the right on the wealth left by a deceased; the weak had no share in it.

The verse وَتُحِبُّونَ الْمَالَ حُبًّا جَمًّا unfolds the motives which lay hid in such a despicable character. The lust for wealth has made them blind to everything else and made them indifferent to the values of humanitarianism, decency, justice and compassion. In other words, they are so overcome with this obsession for wealth that the higher values and ideals of life have no place in their hearts.

كَلَّا إِذَا دُكَّتِ الْأَرْضُ دَكًّا دَكًّا (٢١) وَجَاءَ رَبُّكَ وَالْمَلَكُ صَفًّا صَفًّا (٢٢) وَجِيءَ يَوْمَئِذٍ بِجَهَنَّمَ يَوْمَئِذٍ يَتَذَكَّرُ الْإِنْسَانُ وَأَنَّى لَهُ الذِّكْرَى (٢٣) يَقُولُ يَالَيِّتَنِي قَدَمْتُ لِحَيَاتِي (٢٤)¹³

In these verses, those infatuated with the love of wealth are reminded that when they would come to realize their folly and express the yearning that they should have spent this wealth in preparing for this Day – all this would prove fruitless for them. At this time, they will have to face the

13. Certainly not! They should remember the day when the earth shall be pounded even, and your Lord shall appear in the company of the angels standing in rows and Hell shall be brought near. On that Day, man shall come to think. But then what will this thinking avail him? He will say: “Ah ! Would that that I had done something for my life!”

consequences of their deeds.

In the verse *كَلَّا إِذَا دُكَّتِ الْأَرْضُ دَكًّا دَكًّا* (certainly not! remember when the earth shall be pounded even) the word *كَلَّا* (certainly not!) is meant to negate their view mentioned earlier: a person who is blessed with wealth starts unduly believing that the Almighty has bestowed honour on him. The truth of the matter is that in this world if a person is given something it is to test him. A day will come when everything will be destroyed and a person will be left to face the consequence of his deeds.

The expression *ذَكَ الْأَرْضُ* means *سَوَى صَعُودُهَا وَهَبُوطُهَا* (to tear down all the crests and troughs of the earth). Sūrah Kahf portrays what will happen to the earth in the following words:

إِنَّا جَعَلْنَا مَا عَلَى الْأَرْضِ زِينَةً لِّهَا لِنَبْلُوهُمْ أَيُّهُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا وَإِنَّا لَجَاعِلُونَ مَا عَلَيْهَا صَعِيدًا جُرُزًا (١٨: ٧-٨)

We have adorned the earth with whatever is on it in order to test mankind that which of them does good deeds and one day whatever is on it We will surely reduce it to a barren ground. (18:7-8)

The implication is that the embellishments of the earth are transient. The purpose is to test whether people are totally involved in the engagements of this world or prepare for the next world. A day is bound to come when all these embellishments of the earth will be no more. Its seas and mountains, valleys and orchards, buildings and pavilions all will be destroyed and it will become a level stretch of land.

The implication of the verse *وَجَاءَ رَبُّكَ وَالْمَلَكُ صَفًّا صَفًّا* (and your Lord shall appear in the company of the angels standing in rows) is that though in this world the Almighty is testing mankind while being concealed from their eyes; however, on the Day of Judgement, He will reveal Himself in the company of angels. At that time, the reality will stare people in their eyes in such a blatant manner that no one will be left with any doubt about it.

As far as the question about the nature of appearance of the Almighty is concerned, its details relate to the *mutashābihāt* matters on which one is required to profess faith in a broad sense. If a person starts to go after their details, there is a strong chance of him going astray.

This means that besides the Almighty, Paradise and Hell will also be unveiled which are ready beforehand for reward and punishment. Since the real addressees of this *sūrah* are the proactive adversaries of Islam, Hell is mentioned first. As soon as those who remained indifferent to it would see it, they would be utterly dejected and would out of frustration

earnestly express the wish of having prepared themselves for this day. The Qur'ān says that the real time for carrying out this wish was the previous world. When they were not able to realize this in the previous world, this realization in the next world would be of absolutely no use to them.

The verse يَقُولُ يَالَيْتَنِي قَدَّمْتُ لِحَيَاتِي (he will say: "Ah ! Would that I had done something for my life!") is an explanation of their realization referred to by the words يَتَذَكَّرُ الْإِنْسَانُ (man shall come to think) of the previous verse: On that day, the very people who today are regarding those who are warning them of the Hereafter as foolish would in utter dejection bemoan for not doing anything for the Hereafter. The implication is that they would express this longing on the Day of Judgement, but this longing would be of no use to them. The time to make amends for it would be long gone.

فَيَوْمَئِذٍ لَا يُعَذِّبُ عَذَابَهُ أَحَدٌ (٢٥) وَلَا يُوثِقُ وَثَاقَهُ أَحَدٌ (٢٦)¹⁴

This is a mention of the severity of punishment meted out on that day to the disbelievers. The verse is actually a statement of fact. This is because like the favours and blessings of this day, its hardships and difficulties are also transient and ephemeral. Death can end the greatest of afflictions of a person and it can end the longest period of incarceration of a person; however, in the Hereafter even death will not be able to save a person from the punishment and incarceration he would have to face.

يَا أَيَّتُهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ (٢٧) ارْجِعِي إِلَىٰ رَبِّكِ رَاضِيَةً مَّرْضِيَّةً (٢٨) فَادْخُلِي فِي عِبَادِي
(٢٩) وَادْخُلِي جَنَّاتٍ (٣٠)¹⁵

These verses point to the glad tidings those who are worthy of Paradise will receive directly from the Almighty. The address يَا أَيَّتُهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ needs special consideration. Those worthy of Paradise will be addressed with these words. Evident from this address is a special feature of the souls of such people on the basis of which they had actually become worthy of Paradise. In verses 15-16 above, a feature of the weak and the mean is mentioned: when they are blessed with favours, pride and vanity overcomes them and when they are tested by restricting their resources, they lose hope in God and start complaining to Him and end up in

14. Thus, on that Day, none shall punish as He punishes and none shall bind as He binds.

15. O you whose heart remained firmly attached [with his Lord] proceed towards your Lord such that He is pleased with you and you are pleased with Him. Enter among My servants and enter My Paradise.

despair and despondency. Their fate is then stated. Here, in contrast, the fate of those people is mentioned who strongly adhered to the truth both in ease and discomfort. If they are blessed with favours, they think that they are being tested whether they show gratitude to the Almighty or not and instead of resorting to insurgency and anarchy they try to succeed in this trial of the Almighty and show kindness to others just as the Almighty has remained kind to them. Similarly, if they are faced with hard times, then instead of despairing and losing faith in God, they regard this to be a trial of their perseverance and go as far as to risk their lives in succeeding in this trial; they do this so that they are not faced with embarrassment before their conscience in this world nor before the Almighty in the next world. Since these people remain content and pleased with their God in both ease and hardship, comfort and adversity, they are called “the content souls”. These are the people who will dwell in Paradise.

The sentence اَرْجِعِي إِلَىٰ رَبِّكِ رَاضِيَةً مَّرْضِيَّةً (proceed towards your Lord such that He is pleased with you and you are pleased with Him) is an expression of praise and approbation from their Lord. These people will be addressed by the Almighty and lauded for succeeding in the trial they had been put through in the previous world; they should return to their Lord triumphantly; they have proved that they remained pleased with the Almighty in all circumstances; for this reason they have been blessed with the supreme success of the Almighty being pleased with them; just as they never complained to God in any phase of their life, their God also never found them below His standards at any phase; they are pleased with Him and He is pleased with them.

In the verses فَادْخُلِي فِي عِبَادِي وَادْخُلِي جَنَّتِي (enter among My servants and enter My Paradise) the Almighty address them and says that since they have become worthy of Paradise after succeeding in their trial, they should now join His near ones in Paradise.

With the help of God, the *tafsīr* of this *sūrah* reaches completion. فَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ عَلَىٰ إِحْسَانِهِ (so all gratitude be to God)

Lahore,

14th December 1979 AD

24th Muḥarram 1400 AH

Sūrah Balad

Central Theme, Relationship with the Preceding Sūrah

This *sūrah* forms a pair with Sūrah Fajr, the previous *sūrah*. There is no essential difference between the central theme of both *sūrahs*. In the previous *sūrah*, man is corrected on a misconception: when he receives a favour, he is overcome with pride and conceit thinking that this was his right and that God has actually honoured him; on the other hand, when he is faced with some trial, he starts to despair and becomes sad thinking that he has been denied a right and that he has been humiliated by God. The truth of the matter is that both these circumstances are neither meant to honour him nor to humiliate him: through both, the Almighty actually tests his perseverance and sense of showing gratitude to Him. In this regard, the correct attitude is that neither should a person show pride on receiving a favour nor should he despair and become dejected if he is deprived of it; when he receives a favour, he should express gratitude to God and should share this favour with the needy and when he is faced with hardships, then instead of complaining and brooding and blaming God, he should accept this fate whole-heartedly and show perseverance. A person who adopts this attitude is a person whose soul is at peace and will be blessed with what is stated thus in Sūrah Fajr: رَاضِيَةً مَّرْضِيَّةً (٢٨:٨٩) (they will be happy with their Lord and their Lord will be happy with them, (89:28)).

In this *sūrah*, this formula is applied on the Quraysh and shown that at the time when Abrahām (sws) settled his son Ishmael (sws) in Makkah, it was not only devoid of resources of sustenance and livelihood, it was also devoid of peace and security. However, it was the result of the prayer which Abraham (sws) made for Ishmael (sw) and his progeny before the Almighty to bless them with resources of sustenance and with peace that soon the land not only became abundant with these resources, it also became so secure that harming even an animal came to be regarded as a sin what to speak of human beings. It was as a result of both these provisions that the progeny of Ishmael (sws) progressed and multiplied greatly here and assumed the leadership of the whole country. However, after receiving these favours, these people forgot their previous history. They are now overcome with the claim that whatever they have was their birthright. Spending in the way of God weighs down heavily upon them. They never learn lessons from incidents which happen in their lives. Their

tongues seldom sing the praises of their Lord and seldom express perseverance. Expressions of virtue and kindness also are not found in their conversation. Their wealth is spent for their own merry-making and other wasteful activities. None of them has the resolve to attain success in the Hereafter by making sacrifices for the welfare of the poor and the needy. All of them are treading the path that leads to Hell.

Since these verses belong to the early Makkan period, the address is generally by the words: *يَا أَيُّهَا الْإِنْسَانُ* (O man!) and the appeal found in them is upon humanitarian grounds and upon its natural norms.

Analysis of the Discourse

Following is the sequence of the discourse of the *sūrah*:

Verses (1-4): Testimony is presented from the early history of Makkah and that of the Ishmaelites on the fact that this land was absolutely barren and desolate; life here was very tough and exacting. However, as a result of the favour of God, the supplication made by Abraham (sws) and the blessings of the House of God, this land became safe and secure and its inhabitants were blessed with abundance in food resources.

Verse (5-7): As an obligation towards these favours and blessings of God, these people should have expressed gratitude to Him and lent support and help to the needy; on the contrary, when they are called to spend in the way of God, they cry out that they have already spent a fortune on this and how much more should they give. It is as if they think that the Almighty is not witnessing their wasteful spending.

Verses (8-17): These greedy and avaricious people are rebuked that the Almighty had given them eyes so that they could use them to learn the lessons of life, tongue and lips so that they could use them to urge people in helping the poor and needy and the awareness of good and evil so that they could fight the temptation to evil and do virtuous deeds, help in feeding the poor and profess faith and call people to be sympathetic and compassionate; however, after receiving all this, instead of serving their Lord, they ended up in servitude to their wealth and riches.

Verses (18-20): If these people had adopted the right path, they would have been entitled to great reward in the Hereafter; on the contrary, they rejected the revelations of the Almighty and earned the Fire of Hell for themselves.

Text and Translation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

لَا أُقْسِمُ بِهَذَا الْبَلَدِ (١) وَأَنْتَ حِلٌّ بِهَذَا الْبَلَدِ (٢) وَوَالِدٍ وَمَا وَلَدَ (٣) لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا

الْإِنْسَانَ فِي كَبَدٍ (٤) أَيْحَسَبُ أَنَّ لَنْ يَفْقِدَ عَلَيْهِ أَحَدٌ (٥) يَقُولُ أَهْلَكْتُ مَا لَا لُبَدًا (٦) أَيْحَسَبُ أَنَّ لَمْ يَرَهُ أَحَدٌ (٧) أَلَمْ نَجْعَلْ لَهُ عَيْنَيْنِ (٨) وَلِسَانًا وَشَفَتَيْنِ (٩) وَهَدَيْنَاهُ النَّجْدَيْنِ (١٠) فَلَا اقْتَحَمَ الْعَقَبَةَ (١١) وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا الْعَقَبَةُ (١٢) فَكُ رَقَبَةً (١٣) أَوْ إِطْعَامٌ فِي يَوْمٍ ذِي مَسْغَبَةٍ (١٤) يَتِيمًا ذَا مَقْرَبَةٍ (١٥) أَوْ مِسْكِينًا ذَا مَتْرَبَةٍ (١٦) ثُمَّ كَانَ مِنَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالْمَرْحَمَةِ (١٧) أُولَئِكَ أَصْحَابُ الْمَيْمَنَةِ (١٨) وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِآيَاتِنَا هُمْ أَصْحَابُ الْمَشْأَمَةِ (١٩) عَلَيْهِمْ نَارٌ مُّوَصَّدَةٌ (٢٠)

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Ever Merciful.

No! I swear by this city – and you are its inhabitant – and by the father and his progeny that We created man in a state of hardship. (1-4)

Does he think that no one has power over him? He says: “I have wasted heaps of money.” Does he think that no one has seen him? (5-7)

Have We not given him two eyes and a tongue and two lips and not shown him the two ways? But he did not surmount the steep path. And what have you understood what this steep path is? Freeing of a slave or feeding, in days of famine, of an orphan near of kin or an indigent [down] in the dust – then he be of those who accepted faith and who counselled one another to be patient and sympathetic. These are the fortunate. And those who have denied Our revelations, it is they who are the unfortunate. The Fire shall close in on them. (8-20)

Explanation

لَا أَقْسِمُ بِهَذَا الْبَلَدِ (١)¹

The word لَا (no) occurs here the way it occurs in (١:٧٥) لَا أَقْسِمُ بِيَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ (No! I swear by the Day of Judgement, (75:1)) as well as it occurs in some other instances. I have already explained it. Here it is meant to negate a false notion of the addressees referred to in the previous *sūrah* and precedes the oath. It is mentioned in the previous *sūrah* that when people are blessed with status and affluence, they while regarding this to be a result of their own planning become conceited and express the fact that it was because of being highly regarded by God that they have been given more by Him than others. This erroneous view is refuted in the previous *sūrah* from a particular angle whilst here it is refuted from another angle. This refutation begins with لَا (no) which is actually disproving this false notion. In other words, so baseless and absurd is this notion that citing arguments for its absurdity is not even required before

1. No! I swear by this city.

disproving it. This style is found in every language and is adopted when the purpose is to express the absurdity of a view.

The oath sworn here is meant to bear witness to a claim mentioned ahead by the words (٤) لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي كَبَدٍ. The words بِهِذَا الْبَلَدِ (this city) refer to the city of Makkah. In Sūrah Tīn, this city has been sworn by through the words (٣ : ٩٥) وَهَذَا الْبَلَدِ الْأَمِينِ (and this secure city bears witness, (95:3)). Like most other Qur'ānic oaths, this oath too has not been sworn by Makkah because it is a sacred place; it has been sworn to bear witness to a claim which is mentioned ahead.

وَأَنْتَ حِلٌّ بِهَذَا الْبَلَدِ (٢)²

This is a parenthetical sentence and is meant to emphasize the oath. The addressing pronoun in it can be both for the Prophet (sws) and for the Quraysh. In both cases, there will not be much difference in the interpretation of the verse. The implication is that it is not that the testimony of a far-flung area is being presented whose history and background need to be gauged by the Prophet (sws) or the Quraysh after some effort; both have lived here and are well aware of its past and present; this place is their cherished residence and sanctuary; its history is their own history; they are encountering all the circumstances of their lives in this very place; hence, they can fully assess whether whatever is being said to them is the truth or is an exaggeration or something artificial.

وَوَالِدٍ وَمَا وَلَدَ (٣)³

After the parenthetical sentence, this part is related to the oath mentioned in the first verse and actually completes it. The word وَاِلِد (father) obviously refers to Abraham (sws) and Ishmael (sws) and مَا وَلَدَ (his progeny) refers to the progeny of Ishmael (sws) which first settled in Makkah and later spread to all Arabia. The fact that the word وَاِلِد is not defined by the article *alif lām* can incorporate two meanings into it: it can connote grandeur and majesty and it can also connote scarcity and thereby include both Abraham (sws) and Ishmael (sws) into it. Similarly, the generality found in مَا وَلَدَ is meant to include all the Ishmaelites whatever be the branch from which they descend.

2. and you are its inhabitant.

3. And by the father and his progeny.

لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي كَبَدٍ⁴

The word كَبَدٍ means “hardship” and “toil”. Though the word is general to include all human beings – and there are benefits of this generality – however, here it refers particularly to the foremost addressees of the Qur’ān: the Ishmaelites – specifically the Quraysh. The verse while alluding to the advent and settling down of their ancestors in Makkah and to their early history informs them that they should not think that the abundance of resources and sustenance they possess here at this time was always there or that these circumstances are the result of their own planning and ability. The fact of the matter is that when Abraham (sws) settled his son Ishmael (sws) in this land, it was totally barren and desolate as well as strife-ridden and insecure. People lived here like nomads and their life was full of toil and struggle. Their livelihood depended on their herds and every person was responsible for the protection of his life and of his herd. There was no system that could offer protection to people. When Abraham (sws) settled his son Ishmael (sws) in this barren piece of land, he prayed to the Almighty to bless his progeny with sustenance and resources of livelihood in it as well as with peace and security. It was a blessing of this very prayer that resources of livelihood became abundant and because of their custodianship of the House of God and because of the sanctity granted to this land by the Almighty in the sacred months the doors to trade through peaceful journeys opened. It was as a result of all this that their life of toil and struggle transformed into a life of ease and comfort. They were so overcome with pride and vanity on this life of ease and comfort that they ended up showing indifference to God and His Prophet (sws); they contended that what they received was their birthright and they could expend it in any manner they wanted to and that no one had any power to interfere with their freedom and merry-making.

In order to dispel this misconception of the Quraysh, the Qur’ān has cited the history of the House of God at various places and cautioned them that if they became rebellious after receiving these favours from God, they would only be inviting their doom by this attitude of theirs. Sūrah Ibrāhīm refers to this aspect thus:

وَإِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ رَبِّ اجْعَلْ هَذَا الْبَلَدَ آمِنًا وَاجْنُبْنِي وَبَنِيَّ أَنْ نَعْبُدَ الْأَصْنَامَ رَبِّ إِنَّهُمْ أَضَلُّونَ كَثِيرًا مِّنَ النَّاسِ فَمَنْ تَبِعَنِي فَإِنَّهُ مِنِّي وَمَنْ عَصَانِي فَإِنَّكَ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ

4. that We created man in a state of hardship.

رَبَّنَا إِنِّي أَسْكَنْتُ مِنْ دُرِّيَّتِي بِوَادٍ غَيْرِ ذِي زَرْعٍ عِنْدَ بَيْتِكَ الْمُحَرَّمِ رَبَّنَا لِيُقِيمُوا
الصَّلَاةَ فَاجْعَلْ أَفْنِدَةً مِّنَ النَّاسِ تَهْوِي إِلَيْهِمْ وَارْزُقْهُمْ مِّنَ الثَّمَرَاتِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَشْكُرُونَ
(١٤: ٣٥-٣٧)

And when Abraham prayed: “Lord! Make this a secure land. Protect me and my progeny from being contaminated with worshipping idols. Lord! These idols have led astray many people. So he who follows me is from my brethren and he who disobeys me, You are surely Forgiving and Merciful. Lord! I have settled some of my progeny in a barren piece of land near Your Sacred House O Lord that they may show diligence in the prayer. Incline the hearts of men towards them and provide them with the livelihood of fruits so that they may express gratitude. (14:35-37)

A deliberation on the above quoted verses reveals the following facts:

- The reason that Abraham (sws) settled from among his progeny Ishmael (sws) in a barren and desolate piece of land was that he could be protected from the environment of polytheism.
- Abraham (sws) built the House of God in this land so that his progeny could make it a centre of God’s worship. He also prayed that this centre of worship and his progeny should become a hub to which people turn.
- At that time, Makkah was a barren and infertile land and was also unsafe and insecure. So Abraham (sws) also prayed that its inhabitants be blessed with abundance in food provisions and become safe and secure.

The purpose of presenting all these details is that the status and riches the Quraysh had at the time of the advent of the last Prophet (sws) was neither due to their own planning nor because they were entitled to it as a tribe; whatever they have now is a result of Abraham’s prayer and of blessings of the House of God. This favour from God is conditional on certain obligations.⁵ These include worshipping the Almighty, completion of the objective for which the House of God was built and professing faith in the Prophet (sws) sent to them. If they abide by these conditions, they will remain in this status; otherwise all this will be confiscated from them.

For this very reason, the Almighty has demanded from the Quraysh in

5. It is evident from some other verses of the Qur’ān that the promise of the Almighty of granting leadership to Abraham (sws) was conditional. People who would not follow his ways were not promised this position.

Sūrah Quraysh that if they want to keep receiving the blessings of the House of God, the only way is to worship the God of this House. The implication is that if they do not do so, there is no reason for them to remain the custodians of this House and the recipients of its blessings:

لَا يَلَا فِ قُرَيْشٍ إِلَّا فِيهِم رِحْلَةُ الشِّتَاءِ وَالصَّيْفِ فَلْيَعْبُدُوا رَبَّ هَذَا الْبَيْتِ الَّذِي
أَظْعَمَهُمْ مِنْ جُوعٍ وَأَمَّنَّهُمْ مِنْ خَوْفٍ (١٠٤: ١-٤)

Owing to the association the Quraysh have – the association they have with the winter and summer journeys. So, they should worship the Lord of this House who fed them in hunger and provided them with peace in fear. (104: 1-4)

أَيَحْسَبُ أَنْ لَنْ يَقْدِرَ عَلَيْهِ أَحَدٌ^٦

The verse implies that there is no reason for those who know the early history of this area to be misled by their current affluence that since they are so strongly rooted now no one can uproot them. The Being who blessed them with abundance in food resources in a barren and infertile land can destroy them anytime He wants to especially when they have not even fulfilled the objective for which they had been settled in this area and for which the prophet Abraham (sws) had prayed for them.

يَقُولُ أَهْلَكْتُ مَالًا لُبَدًا (٦) أَيَحْسَبُ أَنْ لَمْ يَرَهُ أَحَدٌ^٧

The previous verse unveils the mentality of people which resulted from their being blessed with status and with an abundance in wealth. This verse unveils the character of people which has emanated from this corrupted mentality.

A person who is overcome with conceit thinking that the wealth and status he has been blessed with was a result of his own planning and strategy or that it was his right by birth has no motivation left in him to spend in the way of God; therefore, he becomes indifferent not only to God but also to the Hereafter. In order to hide their miserliness, such people keep wailing and brooding before the needy about their long list of expenditures and try to prove to them that besides personal expenditures they have to spend so much for national and collective needs that in spite of vast income and resources they are barely able to

6. Does he think that no one has power over him?

7. He says: "I have wasted heaps of money." Does he think that no one has seen him?

live in these means. It is this very method they adopt to silence people who invite them to spend in the name of God and for a better place in the Hereafter. “We have already spent a lot in such heads; how much more should we spend?” is the question they pose to such people. The expression مَالًا لَبَدًّا means “great amount of wealth”.

The verse أَيَحْسَبُ أَنْ لَمْ يَرَهُ أَحَدٌ is an answer to such boastful people: they think that no one is observing their generosity. The fact of the matter is that God is observing everything they do. He knows very well that they don’t spend a dime and still brag about their generous spending. The implication of the verse is that one day the complete account of all these alleged spending will come before them and before other people too.

أَلَمْ نَجْعَلْ لَهُ عَيْنَيْنِ (٨) وَلِسَانًا وَشَفَتَيْنِ (٩) وَهَدَيْنَاهُ النَّجْدَيْنِ (١٠)⁸

These verses caution them that they are so engrossed in their worldly riches that they have not even properly used the two eyes God had blessed them with otherwise they would not have let go of the eternal kingdom of the Hereafter by becoming blind slaves to these trivial things: they could have attained it through this wealth which one day they would have to part with anyway; the love and lust for the trivial and the transient has made them oblivious to the eternal. These verses prod them: they should reflect that the Almighty had blessed them with two eyes so that they could observe their surroundings and see that on the one hand the Almighty has blessed them with wealth and status and on the other they can see that right below their nose are orphans and needy, poor and helpless, weak and sick, the physically handicapped and the deprived who have nothing to eat and nothing to wear. The reason that the Almighty has blessed them with eyes is that they observe all this around them and learn a lesson and become grateful to the Almighty: merely as a favour, He did not make them go through such trying circumstances; hence, as an obligation to these favours, they should have generously spent their money to fulfil the needs of the deprived lot – the money which was given in their custody by the Almighty with a share for such people.

In other words, the verse says that the real use of the eyes was to seek the lessons of life through them and if they do not do so, then being deprived of eyes is much better than being blessed with them.

The words وَلِسَانًا وَشَفَتَيْنِ mean that people have also been blessed with a tongue and two lips in addition to the eyes mentioned earlier. The reason

8. Have We not given him two eyes and a tongue and two lips and not shown him the two ways?

for blessing a person with them is that after seeing and feeling the deprivation around him, he not only takes practical steps to rectify it but urges others also to do so. His urging and exhortation would then become instrumental in others adopting virtue also. In the previous *sūrah*, this aspect is pointed out in the verse: وَلَا تَحَاضُّونَ عَلَى طَعَامِ الْمَسْكِينِ (١٨:٨٩) (and do not urge one another to feed the poor, (89:18)) and in this *sūrah*, the verse ثُمَّ كَانَ مِنَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالْمَرْحَمَةِ (then he be of those who accepted faith and who counseled one another to be patient and sympathetic) serves a similar purpose.

Another thing which becomes evident from this verse is that the awareness of virtue in a person should entail that he should not only adopt that virtue himself but also urge others to do so as well. This is included in his obligation otherwise his virtuous deed will in fact be incomplete. Urging others to adopt virtue is the responsibility of every individual of the society without which he will be held accountable before the Almighty. In Sūrah ‘Aṣr, a thorough treatment will be given to this subject under the verse (١٠٣:٣-١) وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالْحَقِّ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ (and exhorted one another to the truth and exhorted one another to patience, (103:1-3)).

Here a secondary aspect is also worth consideration: the tongue is mentioned with two lips which actually protect it from above and below. The principle is that the more valuable and capable of producing profound, effective and far-reaching results a thing is the more it is protected and safeguarded so that it is secured from any carelessness or negligence in using it. A person’s tongue is one of his most valuable and effective weapons. It is a sharp-edged sword. For this reason, it has been handed over to man in a sheath so that he should only unsheathe it where required and for the purpose it has been given to him by God. It is highly unfortunate that people instead of using it for the right purpose use it for trivial tasks.

The sentence وَهَدَيْنَاهُ النَّجْدَيْنِ refers to the fact that besides blessing man with the faculty of sight, intellect and speech the Almighty has also guided him regarding the two paths – the two paths which are mentioned in Sūrah Dahr in the following words:

إِنَّا هَدَيْنَاهُ السَّبِيلَ إِمَّا شَاكِرًا وَإِمَّا كَفُورًا (٣:٧٦)

We showed him the path. If he wants, he can be grateful or ungrateful. (76:3)

The words of Sūrah Shams are even more clear:

وَتَنْفِيسٍ وَمَا سَوَّاهَا فَأَلْهَمَهَا فُجُورَهَا وَتَقْوَاهَا (٩١: ٧-٨)

And the soul bears witness and the perfection given to it. Therefore [We] inspired it with its evil and its good.⁹ (91:7-10)

No different to this is the explanation I have proffered in Sūrah Qiyāmah that the liking of good and the disliking of evil is ordained in human nature. If a person does evil, it is not because he does not possess the awareness of good and evil, it is because he is overcome by emotions knowing full well that he is committing evil.

فَلَا اقْتَحَمَ الْعَقَبَةَ (١١) وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا الْعَقَبَةُ (١٢)¹⁰

This is a statement of the lack of acknowledgment of the favours of God and the ungratefulness of the addressees. If the Almighty had blessed them with the faculties of intellect and speech and with guidance, they owed some obligation to these favours: they should have tried to surmount the difficulties which came their way in showing compassion and sympathy to God's creation, in having themselves included in the list of the near ones of the Almighty and in achieving the blissful state of their being pleased with God and He being pleased with them. However, because of their greed and spinelessness they did not have the courage to do so: their wealth restrained them.

The word عَقَبَةٌ means "a steep path" and اقْتِحَامٌ means "to climb a slope" or "to do a difficult task". Here this word refers to commendable acts of virtue which relate to showing sympathy to God's creation and to serving the Almighty. Examples are forthcoming. Since, in order to undertake these acts of virtue, a person needs to make sacrifice which weighs down heavily on him hence this is called "surmounting the steep path" by the Qur'ān. Here the phenomenon to which I have referred to at many places in this *tafsīr* should be kept in consideration that since in order to achieve all the higher objectives of life, one needs to divert one's inner-self from deeds which bring immediate benefits and drive it in a totally different direction, this weighs down heavily on it. On the other hand, trivial undertakings produce immediate benefits and one's soul is easily inclined to them. Jesus (sws) has explained this by saying: "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that

9. There is an obvious oversight here by the author whilst translating the word فَأَلْهَمَهَا with God as the speaker in the plural. It should be: "and God inspired it with its good and evil." (Translator)

10. But he did not surmount the steep path. And what have you understood what this steep path is?

leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.” (Matthew, 7:13-14). The narrative¹¹ حَقَّتِ الْجَنَّةُ بِالْمَكَارِهِ (Paradise is surrounded by hardships) also refers to this very aspect.

I have also explained the style found in the verse وَمَا أَذْرَاكَ مَا الْعَقَبَةُ. Such a question is posed to express the majesty or dread of something. The implication of the verse is to inform the addressees that they are dreaming to become the near and favourite ones of the Almighty merely by observing certain rites whereas attaining this position requires the surmounting of steep paths and showing valour and bravery in life; these addressees are avaricious and the avaricious can never attain this position; if they want to do so, then what they must do is spelled out in the next verses.

فَكَ رَقَبَةٍ (١٣) أَوْ إِطْعَامٌ فِي يَوْمٍ ذِي مَسْغَبَةٍ (١٤) يَتِيمًا ذَا مَقْرَبَةٍ (١٥) أَوْ مَسْكِينًا ذَا مَتْرَبَةٍ (١٦)¹²

The first of the mentioned things is liberating a slave. Here it should be kept in consideration that since these verses belong to the initial Makkan period, the Arabs are addressed by the general word “man” and whatever has been required of them also relates to what is universal and what is obvious with regard to human nature. I have already alluded to this aspect in the introduction of this *sūrah*. Liberating a slave and making an effort that others also do so is something which is regarded as a virtue by every sensible person. The Arabs too regarded it to be a great act of virtue. The Qur’ān in its very initial phase of preaching placed this act of human service at the top of all virtues. At that time, other people of the world were yet to have an awareness of this virtue. I have already explained in the *tafsīr* of Sūrah Nūr how from the very beginning the Qur’ān urged and exhorted people to adopt it and how then it embarked upon a campaign to eliminate gradually the institution of slavery from the society.

After this, the verse mentions the feeding of the poor and the indigent. The verb إِطْعَمَ is in its broader connotation and means to fulfil all the needs of such people. It is qualified by the phrase فِي يَوْمٍ ذِي مَسْغَبَةٍ (in days of famine) which is meant to increase the efficacy of the appeal. No doubt feeding the poor is a virtuous act; however, in days of famine its value increases greatly. Similar is the case of the qualifying phrase ذَا مَقْرَبَةٍ (near of kin) after the word يَتِيمًا (orphan). The implication is that every orphan deserves help; however, an orphan who is a relative is most

11. Muslim, *Al-Jāmi‘ al-ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 4, 2174, (no. 2822).

12. Freeing of a slave or feeding, in days of famine, of an orphan near of kin or an indigent [down] in the dust.

worthy of help. No different is the case of the qualifying phrase دَا مُتْرَبَةً ([down] in the dust) after مُسْكِينًا (an indigent).

ثُمَّ كَانَ مِنَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالْمَرْحَمَةِ (١٧)¹³

These verses state the next step that these people should undertake.

Those who are sensitive and whose eyes pick up the downtrodden around them are expected to observe the virtues spelled out above and should also be expected to be among those who embrace faith and among those who call people to show patience and to be sympathetic to their fellow human beings. If they are not able to do so, then this only means that there is some hurdle in their moral and spiritual development which they have not been able to overcome.

Here the word مَرْحَمَةٍ (sympathy) is mentioned together with صَبْرٍ (patience) the way حَقٌّ (truth) is mentioned together with صَبْرٍ (patience) in Sūrah ‘Aṣr. The reason for this is the nature of the deeds of virtue towards which I have referred to while explaining the expression الْعُقَبَةُ افْتَحَمَ in verse eleven: these deeds are generally against one’s inner desires and hence a person has to counter this obstacle while doing such deeds and it is like climbing a slope. Only those people can climb this slope who have the quality of patience in them. The real meaning of patience in Arabic is “perseverance and steadfastness”. Those who are devoid of this quality lack valour and bravery; hence, it was deemed necessary that those who have been urged to do virtuous deeds should also be urged to be patient and steadfast. More details to this will be furnished in the *tafsīr* of Sūrah ‘Aṣr inshallāh.

أُولَئِكَ أَصْحَابُ الْمَيْمَنَةِ (١٨) وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِآيَاتِنَا هُمْ أَصْحَابُ الْمَشْأَمَةِ (١٩) عَلَيْهِمْ نَارٌ مُؤَصَّدَةٌ (٢٠)¹⁴

Here at the end, the fates of those who have the mettle to do the above mentioned deeds and those who do not are stated. There is an ellipsis of some words regarding the *aṣḥāb al-maymanah* as is evident from the contrasting words عَلَيْهِمْ نَارٌ مُؤَصَّدَةٌ regarding the *aṣḥāb al-mash‘amah*. The suppressed words are to the effect: they shall reside in the upper floors of the buildings of Paradise.

The origin of the word مَيْمَنَةٍ can be from يَمِين (right) or from يَمْن

13. then he be of those who accepted faith and who counselled one another to be patient and sympathetic.

14. These are the fortunate. And those who have denied Our revelations, it is they who are the unfortunate. The Fire shall close in on them.

(blessed and fortunate); since here it is mentioned in contrast to مَشَامَةٌ whose origin is شَوْم (misfortune and ill-fated) its origin must be regarded to be the word يُمْن. I have translated it accordingly. However, this difference is mere literal; it will not make any difference in the real purport of the discourse. The Qur'ān has called both these factions as أَصْحَابُ الْيَمِين (companions of the right hand) and أَصْحَابُ الشِّمَال (companions of the left hand). The reason behind these names has been mentioned in Sūrah Hāqqah: the pious will be given their account in their right hands and the impious will be given their account in their left hands. The only difference between both interpretations of the word is that one relates to the apparent and the other to the essence. Obviously, those who will be handed their accounts in their right hands will be the fortunate and lucky and those who will be handed their accounts in their left hands will be the unfortunate and ill-fated.

Consider now the verse: عَلَيْنَهُمْ نَارٌ مُّوصَدَّةٌ. The expression أَوْصَدَ الْبَاب means “he closed the door”. The implication was that they will be enveloped in fire and doors will close upon them. (May God save us from such a torment)

With the grace of God, I have come to the end of this *sūrah's tafsīr*.
فَلِلَّهِ الْحَمْد (To God is due all gratitude).

Lahore,

31st December, 1979 AD

11th Šafr, 1400, AH

Sūrah Shams

Central Theme, Relationship with the Preceding *Sūrah* and Analysis of the Discourse

In Sūrah Balad, the previous *sūrah*, the leaders of the Quraysh were warned that when they came to inhabit Makkah, they had to lead a life full of struggle. Makkah at that time was a desolate and barren piece of land. It was as a result of the supplication of Abraham (sws) and the blessings of the House of God that they received abundance in food and sustenance that made them prosper. Hence after receiving these favours, they should not be overcome with conceit, and spread anarchy in the society. They should remember that the God who has bestowed all these things to them can also snatch them away from them and no one can stop Him from this.

In this *sūrah*, they are warned of their fate should they persist in their arrogance and haughtiness. The *sūrah* begins with the assertion of the fact that this world apparently is a place of opposing forces and elements; however, the Almighty does not allow these opposing forces to exceed their limits with the result that not only these opposing forces do not collide with each other, they on the other hand serve this universe in complete harmony with each other and it is this harmony which guarantees its existence; otherwise, this world would have been destroyed in no time.

After this, an indication is made of the way a human soul is made. The state of this lesser world (ie the human soul) is not different from that of the greater world. This world is also an amalgam of opposing motives and forces and the Almighty has also inspired the human soul with good and evil and inclined it towards good and made it hate evil. It is a requirement of this awareness that a person should maintain the balance of his soul and not let evil motives dominate the good ones. If he is unable to do so, he will become arrogant, and exceed limits and the practice of God is that He does not like arrogance and disorder. He gives respite to these things as far as they remain in expedience to this world. When these things cross the bounds, the Almighty destroys them and cleanses His world from people whose existence becomes dangerous for it in their collective capacity.

At the end, in order to cite an example of this practice of the Almighty,

the Qur'ān mentions the destruction of a nation from amongst the previous nations whose might and majesty was well known to the Quraysh and whose arrogance and rebelliousness is alluded to in their literature. The Quraysh are asked to seek a lesson from their fate and are warned that if they adopt the same arrogant attitude, they too would be seized by the Almighty and no one would be able to help them.

Text and Translation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَالشَّمْسُ وَضُحَاهَا (١) وَالْقَمَرُ إِذَا تَلَاهَا (٢) وَالنَّهَارُ إِذَا جَلَّاهَا (٣) وَاللَّيْلُ إِذَا يَغْشَاهَا (٤) وَالسَّمَاءُ وَمَا بَنَاهَا (٥) وَالْأَرْضُ وَمَا طَحَاهَا (٦) وَنَفْسٍ وَمَا سَوَّاهَا (٧) فَأَلْهَمَهَا فُجُورَهَا وَتَقْوَاهَا (٨) قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ زَكَّاهَا (٩) وَقَدْ خَابَ مَنْ دَسَّاهَا (١٠) كَذَّبَتْ ثَمُودُ بِطَغْوَاهَا (١١) إِذْ انْبَعَثَ أَشْقَاهَا (١٢) فَقَالَ لَهُمْ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ نَاقَةَ اللَّهِ وَسُقْيَاهَا (١٣) فَكَذَّبُوهُ فَعَقَرُوهَا فَدَمْدَمَ عَلَيْهِمْ رَبُّهُمْ بِذُنُوبِهِمْ فَسَوَّاهَا (١٤) وَلَا يَخَافُ عُقْبَاهَا (١٥)

The sun bears witness and its ascent and the moon when it follows it, and the day when it illuminates it, and the night when it enshrouds it, and the sky and the way it is raised bears witness and the earth and the way it is laid out and the soul and the way it is perfected. Then was given awareness of its evil and its good. He succeeded who purified it and he failed who soiled it. (1-10)

The Thamūd denied because of their rebellious attitude when their most wretched person rose. So the Messenger of God warned them of the she-camel of God and her turn to drink. But they rejected him and slaughtered the she-camel; so because of this crime, their Lord let lose His scourge upon them and routed them and He has no fear of its consequences. (11-15)

Explanation

وَالشَّمْسُ وَضُحَاهَا (١) وَالْقَمَرُ إِذَا تَلَاهَا (٢) وَالنَّهَارُ إِذَا جَلَّاهَا (٣) وَاللَّيْلُ إِذَا يَغْشَاهَا (٤)¹

In these verses, attention has been drawn to some manifest physical phenomena which act in compliment to each other. The arguments which the Qur'ān has drawn on this basis of complementarity to substantiate the beliefs of monotheism and the Day of Judgement have been

1. The sun bears witness and its ascent and the moon when it follows it, and the day when it illuminates it, and the night when it enshrouds it.

explained in the previous *sūrahs*. Here, in these verses, the specific aspect which is brought in focus is that although the sun and the moon and the night and day are seemingly opposing to one another as regards their appearance and temperament as well as the effects they cause, however, the Schemer of this world has placed all these parts in the machinery of this globe in such a manner that they do not clash with one another in the slightest way; on the other hand, they work in complete harmony with one another in their respective spheres keeping in view the collective expedience of the universe. Neither does the sun interfere with movement of the moon nor does the moon push itself to appear before its appointed time; neither does the day dare emerge before its appointed time nor does the night have the power to terminate before time the duty the day must observe: لَا الشَّمْسُ يَنْبَغِي لَهَا أَنْ تُدْرِكَ الْقَمَرَ وَلَا اللَّيْلُ سَابِقُ النَّهَارِ وَكُلٌّ فِي فَلَكٍ يَسْبَحُونَ (٤٠:٣٦) (neither is the sun allowed to overtake the moon, nor does the night outpace the day, (36:40)).

It is on the harmony of these opposing forces and elements that the existence and sustenance of this universe depends. If instead of this harmony and accord, these opposing forces exceed the limits, then in no time will this universe be destroyed. For this reason, the Creator of this universe has made them observe certain limits. And thus by their very existence these elements give the message to the living beings of this world that they too should lead a life within the bounds set for them by God. If they violate these limits, they will create disorder in this world and the Lord of this world does not put up with people who create disorder in His kingdom.

وَالسَّمَاءِ وَمَا بَنَاهَا (٥) وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا طَحَاهَا (٦)²

Attention is first directed to the structure of the sky, its enormity and the blessings which exude from it: all this bears witness to the great power, profound wisdom and boundless providence of their maker. The greatest of tasks is not impossible for Him. His wisdom is immense and His mercy and providence are all-embracing. It is the essential requirement of His power, wisdom and providence that people should not be allowed to go scot-free in this world for all their deeds; He should see what people for whom He has made all this do and then reward or punish them accordingly. If He does not do this, then this would mean that all His power and wisdom, mercy and providence are purposeless and this universe is a meaningless creation.

The question arises about the particle مَا in وَمَا بَنَاهَا and وَمَا طَحَاهَا

2. And the sky and its structure bears witness and the earth and its expanse.

whether it is of the nature of a verbal noun (مصدرية) or is demonstrative (موصولة). In my opinion, it is the former. If it is regarded as the latter, then it would refer to God whereas all these oaths are not sworn by Him; they are on the contrary sworn by His signs and the phenomenon He has created. They are meant to specifically direct our attention to those aspects which are meant to convey a message to mankind which can open for them the path of guidance delineated in this *sūrah*. The oaths sworn by the sun, moon, day and night are qualified by clauses such as إِذَا يَغْشَاهَا (when it enshrouds it) and إِذَا جَلَّاهَا (when it illuminates it) and إِذَا تَلَّاهَا (when it follows it). This qualification is meant to set right our point of view. If, in this context, it is said: “I swear by the sky and by He who has made it,” by regarding the particle مَا to be demonstrative, then the nature of this oath will be different from the ones mentioned earlier. One part of this oath will connote bearing witness and the other will be an oath sworn by what is sacred and revered, which would be out of place here. The Almighty has presented the bearing of witness of His signs here and not of His own self. Moreover, referring to God through the particle مَا is not appropriate as well.

It should be kept in consideration that when the particle مَا is used in the sense of a verbal noun, it does not merely convert a verb into a verbal noun, it also directs our attention to the majesty, grandeur, wisdom, uniqueness and creativity hidden or apparent in the verb. Thus for example, the words وَمَا بَنَاهَا which qualify the sky would mean: “and the sky and its amazing structure bear witness.” Implied in it would be all the marvels and wonders of the heavens towards which the Qur’ān has called our attention in its varied style and used them as an argument to substantiate its basic premises. It is obvious that if مَا is used as a demonstrative noun then it would not have the capability in it to allude to all this reasoning. Because of this comprehensive nature of مَا used in the sense of a verbal noun, it is quite difficult to translate it. Some Arabs have translated it keeping in view its comprehensive nature; however, since in Urdu³ this style does not exist, I have not been able to translate it fully even though I have tried my best.

The sentence وَالْأَرْضُ وَمَا طَحَاهَا (and the earth and its expanse bears witness) should also be understood keeping in view the above aspects. In Sūrah Ghāshiyah, it is said: (وَإِلَى الْأَرْضِ كَيْفَ سُطِحَتْ (88:20)) (and [do they not see] the earth, how it has been spread out? (88:20)). I have explained there that implied in this concise and terse statement are details which the Qur’ān has delineated at other places while referring to the marvels and

3. The case of English is no different. (Translator)

wonders of the earth and used them to substantiate its various claims. In other words, the facts on which the word كَيْفَ (how) in this verse of Sūrah Ghāshiyah induces a person to reflect, for the same purpose, the مَا used in the sense of a verbal noun is employed here. However, there is a subtle difference between the nature of the two, an explanation of which is beyond the scope of the discussion intended here.

وَنَفْسٍ وَمَا سَوَّاهَا (٧) فَأَلْهَمَهَا فُجُورَهَا وَتَقْوَاهَا (٨) قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ زَكَّاهَا (٩) وَقَدْ خَابَ مَنْ دَسَّاهَا (١٠)⁴

After the signs in the world around man, attention is directed to the world within him: if a person reflects on his soul, it will become evident to him that His creator has fashioned it thus that the awareness of good and evil is found in it. Obviously, the reason for giving him this awareness is that man should adopt good and shield himself from evil. An obvious outcome of this premise is that only he will succeed who cleanses himself from evil and he will fail who will contaminate it with sins. In other words, the view that a person will not be held accountable for his deeds is something which is against the testimony of his own soul.

The word نَفْس has not been defined by the article *alif lām* and thus it can connote magnitude (*tafkhīm*), multitude (*kathrah*) as well as scarcity (*taqlīl*). In my opinion, here it connotes magnitude (*tafkhīm*). Good examples of this usage are found in previous *sūrahs*. It is stated in Sūrah Burūj: (٣:٨٥) وَشَهِدَ وَمَشْهُودٌ (and one who sees and that what is seen bear witness! (85:3)) and in Sūrah Balad: (٣:٩٠) وَالِدٍ وَمَا وَلَدَ (the father and his progeny bear witness, (90:3)) and, at these places, this usage has been explained. Similar is the use of this word here. The purpose is to direct attention towards the astounding sagacity and propriety found in the human soul and towards its outstanding hidden and apparent abilities.

In the expression وَمَا سَوَّاهَا also, the particle مَا is in the sense of a verbal noun and, as is explained above, directing our attention to the astounding sagacity and propriety found in the human soul as referred to earlier. The Qur'ān has explained this at various places and has argued that the Almighty cannot make something so highly gifted without a purpose; hence it is essential that a day come when it be held accountable before its Lord for its abilities and the favours it has been blessed with.

I have explained the word تَسْوِيَةً (the verbal noun of the verb سَوَّى at various instances in this *tafsīr* that it is used to imply the final stage of

4. And the soul and the perfection given to it. Thus was given awareness of its evil and its good. He succeeded who purified it and he failed who corrupted it.

the process of creation. Thus for example it is said: (الَّذِي خَلَقَ فَسَوَّى (٢:٨٧) (Who has created all things and perfected them, (87:2)). It is evident from this verse that here it is not merely the initial stage of the creation of the human soul which is referred to in this oath, its final stage is also in consideration when it emerged as a masterpiece of God's creativity and became a witness through its own existence that man has come in this world with certain responsibilities. He is God's vice-gerent and answerable before him.

The sentence فَالْهَمَهَا فُجُورَهَا وَتَقْوَاهَا (thus was given awareness of its evil and its good) depicts the details of تَسْوِيَةً. It is in this final stage of the process of man's creation that the Almighty has infused in him a divine spark. It is this divine spark which enables a person to discern good from evil. In the previous *sūrah*, this aspect is referred to by the words: وَهَدَيْنَاهُ (and shown him the two paths? (90:10)) and I have explained it there. Those interested can take a look. For more details, the *tafsīrs* of Sūrah Qiyāmah and Sūrah Dahr can be consulted.

The sentences وَقَدْ خَابَ مَنْ دَسَّاهَا قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ زَكَّاهَا (he succeeded who purified it and he failed who corrupted it) state the obvious and necessary outcome of the awareness of good and evil found in man: When a person has been given the awareness of good and evil, then it is his obligation to adopt good and shun evil. It is this attitude which will lead him to success in this world and in the next. If, on the contrary, he adopts the path of vice, this will lead him to a wretched and miserable fate.

The word دَسَّاهَا is actually دَسَّاسَهَا from دَسَّسَ the root which means "to wrap up something in dirt and to put something into dirt." It is this word which has been transformed into دَسَّاهَا and this transformation has added an emphasis in its meaning (ie absolutely contaminating a thing with dirt). Examples of such transformations are found in Arabic, for example تَطَلَّنَ from تَطَلَّى.

I have regarded adopting good and shunning evil as an obvious outcome of the awareness of good and evil because it is incumbent upon man to correctly use every favour God has bestowed on him. This is in his own interest and also the right way of expressing gratitude for this favour. In other words, if he does not do this, it is as if he is wrecking his own self. Thus, it is incumbent upon a person who has been blessed with two eyes by the Almighty to open his eyes and be vigilant of the ups and downs of the path he is treading. If he walks with eyes shut, there is a strong probability that he might fall in a pit and he himself would be responsible for this mishap and no other person.

A question arises about the complement of oath (*muqsam 'alayh*), ie the premise which is to be substantiated by these oaths. The verses

وَقَدْ خَابَ مَنْ دَسَّاهَا قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ زَكَّاهَا (he succeeded who purified it and he failed who corrupted it) have been regarded by some to be this complement. However, Zamakhsharī has rejected this opinion and there is weight in his rejection. The oaths which are sworn here by the sun, the moon, the day and the night are referring to the fact that the reins of all elements of this world are in the hands of an all-powerful and self-sustaining Being who does not let them leave their specified paths otherwise this world would be destroyed by the clash of its opposing elements. After this, the oaths sworn by the sky and the earth are referring to the power, wisdom and providence of the Creator of this world and the objective is to bring forth the fact that it is the essential requisite of His attributes that no one be allowed to go scot-free and everyone be held accountable for his deeds.

The third oath is sworn by the way human soul has been formed which occupies the status of evidence born by man's inner self. The Qur'ān itself has clarified this oath: when the Creator has ingrained the awareness of good and evil within man's nature then this would necessarily mean that he who adopts good will succeed and he who gives way to evil will meet a dreadful fate.

It is evident from this that وَقَدْ خَابَ مَنْ دَسَّاهَا قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ زَكَّاهَا (he succeeded who purified it and he failed who corrupted it) is not the *muqṣam 'alayh*; it is in fact an explanation of one aspect of the last stated oath. The *muqṣam 'alayh* should be such that it should encompass the natural outcome of all the oaths. For this reason, I think that Zamakhsharī's view is sound when he says that an ellipsis of the *muqṣam 'alayh* has occurred here. The reason for this is that this last part has actually hinted towards it so that there is no need to express it in words. Several examples of ellipses of the *muqṣam 'alayh* can be seen in the previous *sūrahs*. The benefit of this ellipses is that everything which is obvious from the oaths can be regarded as suppressed in the capacity of the *muqṣam 'alayh*. It is difficult to state it here in words; however, one of its prominent aspects can be stated thus: the Creator of the world does not put up with the rebellion of a nation and necessarily destroys it.

Here the philosophy of history presented by the Qur'ān, to which I have alluded at various places of this *tafsīr*, should be kept in mind that as far as nations are concerned they are punished for their rebelliousness in their collective capacity in this very world. In the Hereafter, each person will be held accountable in his personal capacity and will be rewarded or punished accordingly.

كَذَّبَتْ ثَمُودُ بِطَغْوَاهَا (١١) إِذْ انْبَعَثَ أَشْقَاهَا (١٢) فَقَالَ لَهُمْ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ نَاقَةَ اللَّهِ وَسُقْيَاهَا

(١٣) فَكَذَّبُوهُ فَعَقَرُوهَا فَدَمْدَمَ عَلَيْهِمْ رَبُّهُمْ بِذُنُوبِهِمْ فَسَوَّاهَا (١٤)⁵

After presenting evidence from the world around man and that within him, historical evidence is presented to substantiate the premise stated earlier: a nation which resorts to rebelliousness is given respite during which it is communicated the truth to the extent that it is left with no excuse to deny the truth and after that if it insists on this denial, the Almighty necessarily destroys it. The evidence from the world around man and that within him usually relates to reflection and deliberation and thus is beneficial for the intellectuals; it does not effect the common man the way it should. For such people, evidence from incidents and events are more effective on the condition that they are at least capable of drawing a lesson from such events. For this reason, the Qur'ān has also cited historical evidence⁶ besides evidence from the world within man and that around him so that every type of individual is covered in presenting arguments.

At other places, the Qur'ān has mentioned many nations to highlight this aspect; here, only one nation: the Thamūd is mentioned. Some reasons for this are very apparent.

One of the reasons is that from among the ancient nations of Arabia, the Quraysh were relatively more aware of their history. My mentor, Imām Farāhī, has discussed their history and their resemblance with the Quraysh in detail. Following are some of its important excerpts:

The Qur'ān has presented those nations before the Quraysh to seek a lesson from whose history were well known to them. It would be incorrect to conclude that just as the words كَذَّبَتْ ثَمُودُ (the Thamūd denied) portray a hazy account of the Thamūd before us, similarly, these words presented the Quraysh too with very sketchy details about them. Whatever is mentioned in this *sūrah* about the Thamūd was enough to point to their complete history for the Quraysh. They belonged to ancient Arabia whose settlements and traditions were inherited by the Quraysh. They were often discussed by the Quraysh in their everyday conversation. The Qur'ān itself is the greatest

5. The Thamūd denied because of their rebellious attitude when their most wretched person rose. So the Messenger of God warned them of the she-camel of God and her turn to drink. But they rejected him and slaughtered the she-camel; so because of this crime, their Lord let lose His scourge upon them and routed them

6. It may be kept in consideration here that historical evidence also belongs to evidence presented from the world around man; however, because of its special importance, I have mentioned it here as a separate category.

witness to this claim of ours.

The poets have also mentioned the Thamūd as a well-known nation:

ولاقاه من الايام يوم
كما من قبل لم يخلد قدار

(And he was destroyed by the vicissitudes of time the way Qidār too before this could not survive forever.)

In this couplet, Qidār refers to Aḥmar Thamūd, who was the leader of the Thamūd and who killed the she-camel. He was an autocratic and rebellious leader much like Qayl ibn ‘Umar of the ‘Ād people. The famous poet al-Afwah al-Awdī has compared the evil elements of his nation to Qayl and Qidār thus:

فينا معاشر لم يبنوا لقومهم
وان بنى قومهم ما افسد واعادوا

(There are some pranksters among us who have done nothing for their nation and if their nation sets right what they had messed up, they again messed it up.)

لا يرشد ون ولن يرعو المرشدهم
والجهل منهم معا والغى ميعاد

(They neither guide themselves nor listen to those who guide them; Being overcome by emotions and being rebellious are two traits simultaneously present in them.)

اضحوا اكفيل بن عمرو في عشيرته
اذا هلكت بالذى سدى لها عاد

(In their nation, they can be compared to the Qayl ibn ‘Umar who was responsible for the destruction of ‘Ād.)

او بعده كقدار حين تابعد
على الغواية اقوام فقد بادوا

(Or after him, they can be compared to Qidār who was followed by people while being misled and were destroyed.)

It is evident from these couplets that the rebelliousness of the Thamūd, the error and deviance of their leaders and the details of their exemplary fate was so well known to the Arabs that their poets would often quote them in a proverbial style. Thus this brief reference made by the Qur'ān was actually not brief for the Arabs; in fact, through these few words, they could gauge all the details of the of the grievous fate met by the Thamūd.

One needs to specially keep in consideration the word طَغَوَى in the expression كَذَّبَتْ ثَمُودُ بِطَغْوَاهَا. It means insurgency and rebelling against the bounds and limits set by the Almighty. The insurgency referred to here is specially the one which a nation perpetrates after the truth has become fully evident to it. The reason that this word needs to be kept in special consideration is that it relates to the central theme of the *sūrah*. I have already indicated in the introduction to this *sūrah* that the Almighty does not like the rebelliousness of a nation. A nation which adopts such an attitude is given some respite after which it is necessarily destroyed. It is clearly evident from this word that the Thamūd denied their prophet not because the truth was not obvious to them; they in fact denied him after the truth had become obvious to them merely out of their arrogance and rebelliousness.

The words إِذْ أَنْبَعَتْ أَشْقَاهَا express the details of their rebelliousness. The word أَنْبَعَتْ refers to Qidār, the leader of the Thamūd whose callousness became the source of destruction for the whole nation. The word أَنْبَعَتْ means “to rise and to get ready” and here it refers to his getting ready for his crime, which opened the doors of God’s wrath on the whole nation. An explanation of this has already been furnished in the *tafsīr* of the verses 27-29 of Sūrah Qamar. When Ṣāliḥ (sws) the prophet sent to the Thamūd warned them of God’s punishment, they out of their rebelliousness demanded a sign of this punishment otherwise they would not listen to him. On this demand, Ṣāliḥ (sws) nominated a she-camel as a sign for this punishment and at the same time prescribed a test for them. She will have a specific turn in drinking water from a pond and on the day she drinks no one else should drink with her; they should drink on other days. How could they abide by this restriction? They protested against this with their leader. He rose in venom and hamstrung the she-camel. After this, the Almighty granted them a respite of three days to repent from their heinous act; however, this respite only increased their vanity and at last the punishment of God decimated them.

Consider next the verse: فَقَالَ لَهُمْ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ نَاقَةَ اللَّهِ وَسُقْيَاهَا (so the Messenger of Allah warned them of the she-camel of Allah and her turn

to drink). These words portray that when Ṣāliḥ (sws) saw that the callous Qidār had resolved to destroy the wall which shielded the Thamūd from the wrath of God, he warned them for the last time that they should beware of the she-camel of God and her turn to drink water otherwise they will have to face the punishment of God.

The phrase **نَاقَةُ اللَّهِ** is declined in the accusative on account of *tahdhīr* which means that an ellipsis of a verb which conveys the meaning of warning and admonition has occurred here. The eloquence in this ellipsis is that the attention of the listener is completely focused on what is being said. This style in which one intends to warn some is common in many languages also.

The sentence **فَكَذَّبُوهُ فَعَقَرُوهَا** (but they rejected him and slaughtered the she camel) refers to the fact just as earlier the Thamūd had rejected the threat of being punished by the Almighty, similarly, they did not care about this final warning of their Prophet (sws) and went on to reject it as well by regarding it to be mere intimidation and a pressure tactic.

The word **عَقَرَ** means to hamstring a camel. After this, a camel faces certain death. Hence, this word also implies killing. However, this is a “resultant” meaning and not the primary one.

Here one thing that needs to be kept in consideration is that although only one person was responsible for killing the she-camel, the Almighty has regarded the whole nation to have perpetrated this crime and has punished the whole nation as well. From this, an important statute of the Qur’ānic philosophy of history can be gauged viz: The Almighty punishes a whole nation for the crime of a single individual if that whole nation sanctions the crime of that individual. Only those people are saved from this punishment who try whatever they can to reform that individual and if they are unable to do anything then at least they dissociate themselves from that person – this being the lowest level of faith. Below this, there is neither any level of faith nor any way out to shield oneself from the wrath of God.

The word **دَمَدَمَ** in the expression **فَدَمَدَمَ عَلَيْهِمْ رَبُّهُمْ يَذَّيْبُهُمْ** means to kill someone but implied in it is also the intensity and severity of the act of killing which cannot be conveyed by a word which simply means to kill. A true rendering of this would be: “When their Lord sent on them a resounding punishment.” The Qur’ānic words: **فَصَبَّ عَلَيْهِمْ رَبُّكَ سَوْطَ عَذَابٍ** (۱۳:۸۹) (so your Lord let loose on them the lashes of His punishment, (89:13)) convey a similar meaning. Under verse thirty seven of Sūrah Qamar, I have already alluded to the nature of this punishment: it was an amalgam of winter clouds, hail-storm, horrific thunder, lightning and tempestuous winds. The word **دَمَدَمَ** is very appropriate for such a

punishment.

The word **بِذْنِهِمْ** (because of this crime) shows that this punishment was meted out to them because in spite of being warned by the Almighty and His prophet they were audacious enough to harm the she-camel. This she-camel was a sign of divine punishment and as has been explained in Sūrah Qamar, it was made a trial for them so that the extent of rebelliousness of the whole nation could be adjudged. Obviously, any further respite after this would have seen them go after the life of the Messenger of God and this is a crime for which the Almighty does not grant reprieve to any nation. In fact, whenever a nation planned to kill their Messenger, it was necessarily destroyed. This divine practice has been alluded to at various places in this *tafsīr*.

It seems that this *sūrah* was revealed at the time when the leaders of the Quraysh had begun to conspire in their gatherings and in the Dār al-Nadwah to kill the Prophet (sws). Since these mutual consultations were covert, the Qur'ān too instead of openly warning the Quraysh has merely hinted to them that if they are nurturing an evil scheme in their hearts they should fully contemplate its consequences.

The word **فَسَوَّاهَا** refers to the fact that the scourge and punishment of the Almighty absolutely flattened and steamrolled them. The antecedent of the feminine pronoun **هَا** in **فَسَوَّاهَا** declined in the accusative can be the Thamūd or the settlements of the Thamūd.

وَلَا يَخَافُ عُقْبَاهَا (١٥)⁷

The implication is that when the Almighty destroys a nation in such a manner, He does so in accordance with His practice that He has set on the basis of His all embracing knowledge and profound power for the welfare and well-being of this world. Hence, He has neither any fear of the fact that there can be any error in His decision as far as its consequences are concerned nor does He have any fear that anyone can challenge it. He is neither accountable before anyone nor anyone has any power over Him.

In a passing way, this verse also refutes the statements of the Torah which its narrators have inserted into it. For example:

And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. (Genesis, 5:5-6)

7. And He has no fear of its consequences.

Similarly, it is mentioned after Noah's deluge:

And the LORD smelled a sweet savour; and the LORD said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done. (Genesis, 8:21)

With this, I come to the end of the *tafsīr* of this *sūrah*. فَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ عَلَى إِحْسَانِهِ (Gratitude be to God for His favour)

Lahore,
16th January, 1980 AD
27th Šafr, 1400 AH

Sūrah Layl

Central Theme and Relationship with the Preceding Sūrah

This *sūrah* forms a pair with Sūrah Shams, the previous *sūrah*. There is no essential difference between the central themes of the two. Such is the extent of similarity and correspondence between the inner and outer aspects of both that even a common reader of the Qur'ān can feel the harmony and similarity between them.

In the previous *sūrah*, it is stated about the human soul: قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ زَكَّاهَا وَقَدْ خَابَ مَنْ دَسَّاهَا (91:7-10) (he succeeded who purified it and he failed who contaminated it, (91:7-10)). In this *sūrah*, this basic issue has been taken up and the things which contaminate it are explained and the strategy to protect it and things which purify and the way this purification is achieved are also discussed.

Analysis of the Meanings

Following is the sequence of the discourse:

Verses (1-4): The evidence of the world around man and the world within him is presented to show that the Day of Judgement is bound to come. In this world, the Almighty has created everything in pairs. Everything becomes meaningful in conjunction with its counterpart. This proves that this world also has a counterpart: the Hereafter which makes the world a meaningful place. Without it, it becomes a meaningless place in which good and evil are of the same status even though there is an obvious difference between them.

Verses (5-7): Mentioned in these verses are the character and ideology which entitles a person to the successes of the Hereafter and also smoothes out the way for him to reach it.

Verses (8-10): Mentioned in these verses are the character and ideology of a person which lead him to doom and to the pit of Hell.

Verses (11-14): The Quraysh are admonished that the only responsibility of God is to guide them, which He has. It is not His responsibility to make them adopt this guidance. If they tread on the path of guidance, it is they who will benefit otherwise they should know that this world and the next are in the grasp of God. Neither can anyone save them here from Him nor be of any benefit to them in the world to come.

Verses (15-21): An explanation of the character of people who will be

thrown into Hell and those who will be shielded from it and how they will be rewarded.

Text and Translation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا يَغْشَى (١) وَالتَّهَارِ إِذَا تَجَلَّى (٢) وَمَا خَلَقَ الذَّكَرَ وَالْأُنثَى (٣) إِنَّ سَعْيَكُمْ لَشَتَّى (٤) فَأَمَّا مَنْ أَعْطَى وَاتَّقَى (٥) وَصَدَّقَ بِالْحُسْنَى (٦) فَسَنُيَسِّرُهُ لِلْيُسْرَى (٧) وَأَمَّا مَنْ بَخِلَ وَاسْتَغْنَى (٨) وَكَذَّبَ بِالْحُسْنَى (٩) فَسَنُيَسِّرُهُ لِلْعُسْرَى (١٠) وَمَا يُغْنِي عَنْهُ مَالُهُ إِذَا تَرَدَّى (١١) إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا لَلْهُدَى (١٢) وَإِنَّ لَنَا لَلْآخِرَةَ وَالْأُولَى (١٣) فَأُنذِرُكُم نَارًا تَلْقَى (١٤) لَا يَصْلَاهَا إِلَّا الْأَشْقَى (١٥) الَّذِي كَذَّبَ وَتَوَلَّى (١٦) وَسَيُجَنَّبُهَا الْأَتْقَى (١٧) الَّذِي يُؤْتِي مَالَهُ يَتَزَكَّى (١٨) وَمَا لِأَحَدٍ عِنْدَهُ مِنْ نِعْمَةٍ تُجْزَى (١٩) إِلَّا ابْتِغَاءَ وَجْهِ رَبِّهِ الْأَعْلَى (٢٠) وَلَسَوْفَ يَرْضَى (٢١)

In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Ever Merciful.

The night when it darkens bears witness and the day when it brightens and the creation of the male and the female species also that your earning is different from one another. (1-4)

So, he who gave in the way of Allah and was God-fearing and believed in good fate, We shall entitle him to a destination of joy. And he who was a miser and was indifferent and belied good fate, We shall grant him respite for a destination of hardship. (5-10)

And what will his wealth avail him when he plunges into the Pit! It is for Us to impart understanding! And in Our control is the next world and this world also. So I have informed you of the blazing fire. (11-13)

Only he shall enter it who is the most wretched; who denied and turned away. And the God-fearing shall be protected from it who spends his wealth to achieve purity and who does not confer favours on anyone for recompense but only to seek the countenance of his Lord, Most High. And he shall also prosper. (14-21)

Explanation

وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا يَغْشَى (١) وَالتَّهَارِ إِذَا تَجَلَّى (٢) وَمَا خَلَقَ الذَّكَرَ وَالْأُنثَى (٣)¹

We have been explaining at various instances in this *tafsīr* that the various oaths sworn by natural phenomenon are meant to substantiate a premise. The night and day and the male and female species form

1. The night when it darkens bears witness and the day when it brightens and the creation of the male and the female species also

complementary pairs and together these pairs fulfil the purpose for which they have been created by the Almighty. Each member of a pair possesses a void which is only filled by the other. Without its counterpart neither does a thing have any use nor can one understand the purpose of granting it with certain capabilities. The Qur'ān has not only presented this harmony between opposing members of a pair as an argument on monotheism which we have alluded to under relevant verses, it has also presented it as an argument to substantiate the Hereafter as is the case in this verse. For example it is said in Sūrah Dhāriyāt: **وَمِنْ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقْنَا زَوْجَيْنِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ** (and made pairs from all things, so that you may receive reminder, (51:49)) ie receive reminder on the fact that this world also has its counterpart with which it forms a pair and it is with this counterpart that it fulfills the purpose for which it had been created. We have already explained this aspect in the referred to verse of Sūrah Dhāriyāt and at other places of this *tafsīr* as well. I shall also elaborate upon it when in the coming verses of this *sūrah*, the complement of oath (*muqsim* 'alayh) is explained.

The particle **مَا** in the verse **وَمَا خَلَقَ الذَّكَرَ وَالْأُنثَىٰ** is of the nature of a verbal noun (مصدرية). I have already discussed it under the fifth verse of the previous *sūrah*. Repeating it here would be needless.

إِنَّ سَعْيَكُمْ لَشَتَّىٰ²

This is the claim which is substantiated from the oaths sworn in the previous verses: the fact that every object exists in this world in pairs and the fact that it is together with its counterpart that an object fulfils the purpose for which both have been created shows that this world also has a counterpart which is the next world. This next world is a certainty and it is with it that this world seems a meaningful creation; otherwise it is a meaningless and pointless entity. If there is no next world, this would mean that the righteous and the wrongdoers are of equal status before the Creator. It is of course is against the majesty of a Wise Creator that He regard the reward each earns from his deeds to be equal.

The word **سَعَىٰ** is used not only for effort it is also used for the consequences of an effort and here it is used in this latter sense. In the following verse, an example of this usage can be seen: **وَأَن لَّيْسَ لِلْإِنسَانِ إِلَّا** (and that each man shall be judged only by what he strove for and that his labours shall soon be examined, (53:39-40))

The word **شَتَّىٰ** is the plural of **شَتِيتٌ** and refers to what is different and

2. That your earning is different from one another.

separate from one another. The implication is that it is an obvious requirement of human nature and intellect that the consequences of the *سُئِي* of the righteous and the wrongdoers be different: those who have done virtuous deeds be rewarded and those who have done evil deeds will be rewarded accordingly. In other words, the claim that a Day of Judgement must come has been presented here on the basis of the real need for the advent of such a day: it is essential that such a day come because without it this world is nothing but a place of merrymaking where one may go scot-free for all one's deeds. Thus, for this reason, the Qur'ān has asked people who do not believe in the Day of Judgement: أَفَحَسِبْتُمْ أَنَّمَا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ عَبَثًا وَأَنَّكُمْ إِلَيْنَا لَا تُرْجَعُونَ (١١٥: ٢٣) (Do you think that We have created you in vain and that to Us you would never be returned? (23:115). At another instance, this same question is posed in a manner expressing amazement to those who deny the Day of Judgement: أَفَتَجْعَلُ الْمُسْلِمِينَ كَالْمُجْرِمِينَ مَا لَكُمْ كَيْفَ تَحْكُمُونَ (٣٦-٣٥: ٦٨) (Are We to deal with those who submit to Us as We deal with those who transgress? What is the matter with you? What is this judgement you make? (68:35-36)).

فَأَمَّا مَنْ أَعْطَى وَاتَّقَى (٥) وَصَدَّقَ بِالْحُسْنَى (٦) فَسَنُيَسِّرُهُ لِلْيُسْرَى (٧)³

This verse mentions the details of the difference between what the righteous and wrongdoers will earn there and which should also become evident.

A mention of the word *اتَّقَى* after *أَعْطَى* is to express the fact that the purpose of this spending in the way of God should not be to boast and brag or some other worldly motive: it should only be the desire to gain the pleasure of the Lord and the fear of the day on which nothing except good deeds shall avail a person. In Sūrah Dahr, this aspect is explained thus:

يُوفُونَ بِالنَّذْرِ وَيَخَافُونَ يَوْمًا كَانَ شَرُّهُ مُسْتَطِيرًا وَيُطْعِمُونَ الطَّعَامَ عَلَى حُبِّهِ مِسْكِينًا وَيَتِيمًا وَأَسِيرًا إِنَّمَا نُطْعِمُكُمْ لِوَجْهِ اللَّهِ لَا نُرِيدُ مِنْكُمْ جَزَاءً وَلَا شُكْرًا إِنَّا نَخَافُ مِنْ رَبَّنَا يَوْمًا غَیْبًا قَمَطِيرًا (٧٦: ٧-١٠)

They used to keep their vows and remained fearful of the Day whose horror will spread far and wide, and used to give food to the poor, the orphan and the captive in spite of being needy of it; [their driving force being:] we are feeding you for Allah only. Indeed, we dread

3. So, he who gave in the way of Allah and was God-fearing and believed in good fate, We shall entitle him to a destination of joy.

from our Lord a Day, grim and distressful. (76:7-10)

In the expression وَصَدَّقَ بِالْحُسْنَى, the noun qualified by the adjective الْحُسْنَى is suppressed. The suppressed noun is الْعَاقِبَةُ (fate) or some other of similar meaning. The implication is that they have faith that spending in the way of God and virtue will reap good results for them. This also is a mention of the real motive of their virtue: together with the fear of the Hereafter, they also have the faith that the Almighty will reward them for all their good deeds.

A person who neither has any fear of the Hereafter nor does he believe that the tiniest of his virtuous acts will be rewarded in the Hereafter will, in the first place, not find any urge in him to spend and if he does, he will necessarily do it for some worldly need. Such spending does not have any blessings from the Almighty. It is stated in Sūrah Mā'un: أَرَأَيْتَ الَّذِي يُكَذِّبُ بِالدِّينِ فَذَلِكَ الَّذِي يَدْعُ الْيَتِيمَ وَلَا يَخْضُ عَلَى طَعَامِ الْمَسْكِينِ (107:1-3) (Have you seen the one who belies the Day of reward and punishment?! He it is who drives away the orphan, and urges not the feeding of the poor. (107:1-3))

In the expression فَسَنَيْسِرُهُ لِلْيُسْرَى the noun qualified by the adjective الْيُسْرَى is suppressed like that of الْحُسْنَى in the previous verse. The implied expression is الْعَاقِبَةُ الْيُسْرَى. This also is a mention of the practice of the Almighty mentioned at many places in the Qur'an: The Almighty facilitates a person who adopts the path of virtue by removing the hardships that come his way and by giving him the urge to tread this path with more vigour. Thus at one place in the Qur'an it is said: وَلِلَّذِينَ جَاهَدُوا فِيْنَا لَنَهْدِيَنَّهُمْ سُبُلَنَا (29:69) (Those who will strive in Our cause, We shall guide them to Our paths, (29:69)). In the verse under discussion, his destination has been called الْيُسْرَى (easy) because his reckoning will be easy. Consequently, it is said in Sūrah Inshiqāq: فَسَوْفَ يُحَاسَبُ حِسَابًا يَسِيرًا (84:7-8) (And he who is handed his account in his right hand, his reckoning will be very easy, (84-7-8)).

وَأَمَّا مَنْ بَخِلَ وَاسْتَغْنَى (٨) وَكَذَّبَ بِالْحُسْنَى (٩) فَسَنَيْسِرُهُ لِلْعُسْرَى (١٠)⁴

This is a mention of people who regard this worldly life to be the real life. They are misers and callously guard their wealth and have no fear of the Hereafter; they neither believe in any day of reward nor have the guts to struggle hard for it. The fate of such people will be completely opposite to the ones mentioned earlier. The Almighty will grant them the

4. And he who was a miser and was indifferent and belied good fate, We shall grant him respite for a destination of hardship.

respite to tread the path they have chosen for themselves and this will lead them to a destination which will be full of hardships. Here too the noun qualified by the adjective الْعُسْرَى is suppressed and the word تَيْسِيرٌ connotes giving respite.

At many places in the Qur'ān, this practice of the Almighty has been mentioned that people who do not have the courage to adopt the path of virtue are left by the Almighty at the mercy of their base desires. They encounter no opposition from these base desires with them and for this reason they think that they are smoothly going on in life. While becoming a prey to these base desires, they reach the end of their lives. After this comes the phase to which the Qur'ān has referred by the words: سَأَرْهُقُهُ (soon I will make him climb a mounting slope, (74: 17)). In these verses, under discussion, it is this phase which is alluded to.

Diametrically opposite are the lives of people who muster courage to tread the path of faith and do righteous deeds. At every step, they have to fight their base desires and it is through this assault that they gradually gain the strength needed to fight the hardships of this path. Finally they reach their destination mentioned thus in the Qur'ān: فَادْخُلِي فِي عِبَادِي: [Return] and enter among My servants and enter My Paradise, (89:29-30)).

وَمَا يُغْنِي عَنْهُ مَالُهُ إِذَا تَرَدَّى⁵

Here the particle مَا can be for negation and can also be interrogative. There is not much difference between the two; however, in case of the latter, an emphasis shall be added to the verse and for this reason I have given preference to it. The verse actually admonishes people who in spite of having wealth evade spending it in the way of God. The implication of the verse is that if wealth has any permanent benefit for a person, then it is spending it for the cause of God and saving it for one's eternal life. If a person is not able to do this, then not only will this wealth be of no benefit to him, it will become a source of doom for him.

إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا لَلْهُدَىٰ (١٢) وَإِنَّ لَنَا لَلْآخِرَةَ وَالْأُولَىٰ⁶

The admonition sounded above is repeated here in different words: It is the responsibility of God to guide people which He has by sending His Messenger. It is not His responsibility to force this guidance on people.

5. And what will his wealth avail him when he plunges into the Pit!

6. It is for Us to impart understanding! And in Our control is the next world and this world also.

Accepting this guidance is their responsibility. Those who accept it, will succeed and those who do not will face its consequences.

The words وَإِنَّ لَنَا لَلْآخِرَةَ وَالْأُولَى in fact augment the admonition even further: people should keep in mind that whether it is this world or the next, both are in the control of the Almighty. With one's own strategy no one can achieve anything in this world nor in the next. If anyone is banking on one's racial superiority or on one's deities, he should know that such things will not be found in the Hereafter. There each person will face the Almighty alone. In Sūrah Najm (53:25), this aspect has already been discussed.

Readers are advised to take a second look at verse eight earlier.

وَأَمَّا مَنْ بَخِلَ وَاسْتَغْنَى. The wealthy often vainly think that the wealth and riches they have are because of some strategy and tactic of their own. For this reason they think that they have no need for God. When Qārūn (Korah of the Bible) was reminded that he should acknowledge his obligation to God because the wealth he has is from God. He replied: إِنَّمَا أُوتِيْتُهُ عَلَىٰ عِلْمٍ (these riches were given me on account of the knowledge I possess, (28:78)). The implication being that he has obtained it through his own ability and intelligence and God has no role in giving it to him. This, more or less, is the mentality of every capitalist. The Qur'ān by using the words وَإِنَّ لَنَا لَلْآخِرَةَ وَالْأُولَى (and in Our control is the next world and this world also) has actually severely dented this concept: these words stress that whatever a person obtains in this world is from God and whatever he will in the next is also from God. No one is His partner, neither in this world nor in the next.

فَأَنْذَرْتُكُمْ نَارًا تَلَظَّى (١٤) لَا يَصْلَاهَا إِلَّا الْأَشْقَى (١٥) الَّذِي كَذَّبَ وَتَوَلَّى (١٦)
وَسَيُجَنَّبُهَا الْأَتْقَى (١٧) الَّذِي يُؤْتِي مَالَهُ يَتَزَكَّى (١٨)⁷

After stating the principle described earlier in general terms, here in these verses, the Quraysh are addressed and warned beforehand of the blazing fire they will have to face as a result of their denial and rejection of the truth. Only those people will be caste into it who are the wretched and who persist in their denial. On the other hand, people who spend their wealth to attain purity will be shielded from this fire.

It should remain clear that the comparison here is not been the less wretched and the more wretched and the less pious and the more pious. It

7. So I have informed you of the blazing fire. Only he shall enter it who is the most wretched; who denied and turned away. And the God-fearing shall be protected from it who spends his wealth to achieve purity.

is between the rejecters of the Messengers of God and those who profess faith in them. A Messenger is able to completely communicate the truth to his addressees such that they are not left with any legitimate excuse to deny it; therefore, all his rejecters are أَشَقَّى (the most wretched). Thus the word أَشَقَّى is qualified by the attributes الَّذِي كَذَّبَ وَتَوَلَّى (who denied and turned away) which shows that here the reference is to people who have denied the Messenger is his very presence. It is such people who are the most wretched and will be caste into the blazing fire prepared for them much before they will enter it. On the other hand, people who get hold of themselves as a result of the warnings sounded by the Messenger and prepared for the accountability of the Day of Judgement and spent in the way of God to cleanse it from stains that soil it are all أَتَّقَى (the God fearing). The reason for this is that they acknowledged the Messenger when the society in its collective capacity was his enemy and adopted the path of virtue in times when there were very few who had the strength to tread this path. It is for this reason that the status of the people who become the companions of a Messenger in the initial stages is that of the *sābiqūn* (the foremost) and the *muqarrabūn* (the nearest) and very few people of the later stages are lucky enough to gain this status.

Some people have argued on the basis of this verse that Hell is reserved only for people who are the most wretched. The less wretched shall not be caste into Hell. This conclusion holds little ground. If it is regarded as correct, then a person can also interpret this verse to mean that only those people will be shielded from Hell who are the most pious (أَتَّقَى). The general pious ones would not be shielded from it. It can also be interpreted from this verse that only the most pious (أَتَّقَى) would be entitled to Paradise. The general pious ones would be deprived from it. Obviously, all these interpretations are erroneous. Those who have interpreted this verse in this manner have misunderstood it because of not being able to comprehend it in its true context and occurrence. I have endeavoured to explain this context after which hopefully such misunderstandings would not result.

وَمَا لِأَحَدٍ عِنْدَهُ مِنْ نِعْمَةٍ تُجْزَى إِلَّا ابْتِغَاءَ وَجْهِ رَبِّهِ الْأَعْلَى (٢٠)⁸

This is an explanation of the words يُؤْتِي مَالَهُ يَتَزَكَّى: only that spending in the way of God to purify one's wealth has any significance in the eyes of God which is done to please Him. It should not be the case that a person actually does a favour on another so that he can in return gain some

8. and who does not confer favours on anyone for recompense but only to seek the countenance of his Lord, Most High.

favour from him. Sūrah Dahr also mentions this aspect: **إِنَّمَا نُنْظِعُكُمْ لَوَجْهِهِ** (no reward do we desire from you nor gratitude, (76:9)). Some people have translated this verse as: “And no one has done him a favour for which he is obliged to repay it.” Although this translation cannot be regarded as linguistically incorrect; however, if this means that if a person spends on someone who has done him some favour, then such spending would not be regarded as being done to please the Almighty, then this is not comprehensible. If a person does a favour to another person to repay a favour, then though this might not be equivalent to a favour done by a person to someone who has not done a favour to that person, but why should it not be counted as an act of virtue. If on one occasion, a poor person quenched another person’s thirst and if this second person at some other occasion fed the first, then how can this act not be regarded as being done to please the Almighty? Readers are advised to take another look at the way I have translated this verse. In my opinion, it is correct linguistically also and does not create any confusion as regards the interpretation of the verse.

وَلَسَوْفَ يَرْضَىٰ (٢١)⁹

This verse gives glad tidings to people who are fortunate enough to spend in the way of God in the manner described earlier: Words are unable to state the extent of what the Almighty has promised in this verse. They refer to what is stated at the end of Sūrah Fajr: **رَاضِيَةً مَّرْضِيَّةً** (٢٨:٨٩) (they will be happy with their Lord and their Lord will be happy with them, (89:28))

With these words, we come to the end of the exegesis of this *sūrah*. **فَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ أَوَّلًا وَآخِرًا** (Gratitude be to God from the beginning to the end).

Lahore,
28th January 1980 AD
9th Rabī‘ al-Awwal, 1400 AH

Sūrah Duḥā

Central Theme and Relationship with Preceding and Succeeding Sūrahs

This *sūrah* along with the succeeding one: Alam Nashrah form a pair. In both these *sūrahs*, the Prophet (sws) is assured that he will succeed in the mission he has been entrusted with by the Almighty. All the hardships he is now facing will come to an end. This subject is also discussed in previous *sūrahs*. However, it is discussed in a subsidiary manner. In these *sūrahs*, it is discussed as the primary subject. It is as if in the backdrop of both these *sūrahs*, all the phases of his life are brought before him. The style of assurance adopted in both *sūrahs* reflect their period of revelation. It is evident from Sūrah Duḥā that it was revealed in that part of the Makkan period in which the Prophet (sws) was facing intense opposition; so intense was it that he became dejected at not seeing room for any progress of his mission; on the other hand, it is evident from Sūrah Alam Nashrah that it was revealed in the period when in spite of strong opposition some signs of success had started to manifest.

Analysis of the Sūrah

Following is the sequence of the discourse of the *sūrah*:

Initially, signs in the world around man are cited to show that just as for the material development of this world, the heat and light of the day are needed and so are the coldness and darkness of the night similarly, for the development of hidden potentials in a person, it is essential to make him pass through both ease and difficulty and sorrow and happiness. People who understand the importance of such trials for their training and instruction and also benefit from them, develop their latent qualities through them and those who do not know how to come to grips with such circumstances or because of their feeble and frail nature do not take advantage of these circumstances which have been destined for them deprive themselves of this high place which no one can achieve unless he passes this test.

After a delineation of this principle, the Prophet (sws) is addressed and given assurance that the trial he is passing through is not because the Almighty has no concern for him or because He is angry with him. It is part of the greater trial which is essential for the moral development of a person.

He is then given glad tidings of the fact that the period through which he is currently passing is a prelude to better times in which His gracious Lord will bless him with success which will make him happy.

After this, an indication is made of some of the phases of his life which occurred before prophethood or occurred in its beginning which were apparently tough and from which the Almighty led him out. Such was this divine help that the whole world became accessible to him and he was also blessed spiritually.

At the end, he is guided to fulfill the obligations towards these favours bestowed on him. This is also a passing comment on people who have been mentioned in previous *sūrahs* who after being blessed with favours became proud and usurped the rights of God's creatures.

Text and Translation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
وَالضُّحَى (١) وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا سَجَى (٢) مَا وَدَّعَكَ رَبُّكَ وَمَا قَلَى (٣) وَلَلْآخِرَةُ خَيْرٌ لَّكَ مِنَ الْأُولَى (٤) وَلَسَوْفَ يُعْطِيكَ رَبُّكَ فَتَرْضَى (٥) أَلَمْ يَجِدْكَ يَتِيمًا فَآوَى (٦) وَوَجَدَكَ ضَالًّا فَهَدَى (٧) وَوَجَدَكَ عَائِلًا فَأَغْنَى (٨) فَأَمَّا الْيَتِيمَ فَلَا تَقْهَرْ (٩) وَأَمَّا السَّائِلَ فَلَا تَنْهَرْ (١٠) وَأَمَّا بِنِعْمَةِ رَبِّكَ فَحَدِّثْ (١١)

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Ever Merciful.

The time of mid-morning bears witness and the night when it becomes still that your Lord has neither abandoned you nor is He displeased with you. And the coming period shall be better for you than the previous one. And your Lord will give you such that you shall be pleased. (1-5)

Did He not find you an orphan and gave you shelter? And found you wandering and guided you? And found you in need and enriched you? (6-8)

So, do not suppress the orphan and do not scold the one who asks and proclaim the favour of your Lord. (9-11)

Explanation

وَالضُّحَى (١) وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا سَجَى (٢)¹

الضُّحَى refers to the time of mid-morning when people begin their daily routines and after resting the whole night start their day with a new vigour.

1. The time of mid-morning bears witness and the night when it becomes still.

The Qur'ān has presented the night as an evidence on various aspects depending upon the context, as is evident from this *tafsīr*. Here the words *إِذَا سَجَى* qualify it. The word *سَجَى* means “to become stationary” and “to come to a standstill”. This shows that that part of the night is implied here which becomes still and silent from the noise and clatter of the day and of the early part of the night and is able to provide comfort to man. In other words, in contrast to the part of the day which is referred to by the word *الضُّحَى*, the words *وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا سَجَى* refer to the corresponding part of the night.

A little deliberation shows that the day and the night are totally different from one another with regard to their outlook, nature and the effects they produce; however, despite this difference, man needs both, and this world, in its collective capacity, also needs both the night and the day for its sustenance. It is God's great mercy that He created the night with the day and the day with the night, and both work in complement to each other to keep this world in existence. The Qur'ān has referred to this complementary nature of day and night at various instances:

هُوَ الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمُ اللَّيْلَ لِتَسْكُنُوا فِيهِ وَالنَّهَارَ مُبْصِرًا (٦٧:١٠)

He it is who has made the night dark for you so that you can receive comfort in it and made the day bright. (10:67)

وَمِنْ رَحْمَتِهِ جَعَلَ لَكُمُ اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ لِتَسْكُنُوا فِيهِ وَلِتَبْتَغُوا مِنْ فَضْلِهِ وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ (٧٣:٢٨)

And of His mercy is that He has made the night and day so that you can receive comfort in the night and seek His bounty in the day so that you become grateful [to Him]. (28:73)

مَا وَدَّعَكَ رَبُّكَ وَمَا قَلَى² (٣)

It is to validate this premise that oaths are sworn by various phenomena of the physical world in the previous verses. The implication is that just as in this world the heat and light of the sun are essential and so are the darkness and stillness of the night, in a similar manner, the trials of happiness and sorrow, ease and difficulty, affluence and poverty are essential for the spiritual and moral development of man. It is through these circumstances that the Almighty tests a person whether he

2. That your Lord has neither abandoned you nor is he displeased with you.

becomes thankful in hard times and patient in bad ones. In other words, the Prophet (sws) is assured that if at that time he was facing stiff opposition and had little following and meager resources and divine guidance and revelation were also not to his satisfaction, then this does not mean that his Lord had abandoned him or was displeased with him: these circumstances are a trial and test to train and instruct him in order to fully prepare him to bear his responsibilities.

All this content which is sounding assurance to the Prophet (sws) is implied in this verse. This content is also evident from the previous verse and the succeeding ones as well as the next *sūrah* also. However, to give due consideration to brevity, in the complement of oath (*muqṣam* 'alayh) only that part of the assurance has found mention which the Prophet (sws) needed the most at that time: he has been assured that the circumstances he was facing at that time do no relate to the fact that the Almighty had become indifferent to him or was unhappy with him. He was facing these trying circumstances in accordance with the practice and law of the Almighty regarding training and instruction.

It should be kept in consideration that in the Makkan period, when the opposition from the Quraysh became pronounced, the Prophet (sws) became worried that perhaps some of his own errors or strategic mistakes might have caused this augmentation in their animosity. This might have made the Almighty angry as a result and he was facing these trying circumstances as a wrath of God. This feeling of course was very burdensome as is evident from the following verse of the next *sūrah*:

(وَوَضَعْنَا عَنْكَ وِزْرَكَ الَّذِي أَنقَضَ ظَهْرَكَ (94:2-3)) (and relieved you of the burden which weighed your back? (94:2-3))

Quite naturally, he would wait anxiously for divine revelation in this state of worry because it was the only thing which could show him light and it was through it that he could estimate whether he was fulfilling his obligation of preaching to the satisfaction of the Almighty or if something was amiss in discharging this duty or if he was committing some strategic mistake in this matter. As far as the time of revelation is concerned, it is based entirely on the wisdom of the Almighty. It is not necessary that a revelation descend when the Prophet (sws) is worried or anxious. Consequently, in such circumstances his worries would naturally double while waiting for a revelation. This worry of the Prophet (sws) has been mentioned in many places in the Makkan *sūrahs* and we have been referring to it. Those who would like to know the details should look up the *tafsīrs* of Sūrah Tāhā and Sūrah Qiyāmah.

The assurance sounded in these verses relate to the circumstances just mentioned. It is not necessary that this verse had been revealed in response to the taunt of the disbelievers that the Lord of this person had

forsaken him. When, in the first place, did the disbelievers accept the fact that the Prophet (sws) or the message he preached had something to do with God and that He would send revelations to him. They would regard the Prophet (sws) to be a poet and a soothsayer. Moreover, only the Prophet (sws) experienced the coming of a revelation or the lack of it. How would the disbelievers have known whether the Prophet (sws) would be receiving a revelation or a break had occurred in it. As far as preaching and propagation are concerned, not for a day did the Prophet (sws) desist from them. How could then the disbelievers have taunted him that he no longer was serving the Almighty in the capacity of a Messenger or that the Almighty had forsaken him.

وَلِلْآخِرَةِ خَيْرٌ لَّكَ مِنَ الْأُولَىٰ (٤)³

Here the words *آخِرَةُ* and *أُولَىٰ* do not refer to the terms the “Hereafter” and “the Herein” respectively. They are general in their connotation: they refer to the initial or later period of the preaching mission or to its present and future state.

This verse is an explanation of the assurance sounded by the previous verse: the current circumstances will soon change and the future will be better than the past and the present. These glad tidings of a better future are given by the Qur’ān both openly and tacitly at many places. In the ancient scriptures also, the predictions which are mentioned about his advent cite the parable that the beginning of his preaching would resemble a mustard seed which indeed is very small but outgrows all other vegetable plants when it sprouts – so much so that birds build their nests on it.

The glad tidings sounded by the word *خَيْرٌ* are comprehensive in nature. It gathers in it the aspects of supremacy and victory of Islam, the conquest of Makkah, humiliation of the enemies and people entering the folds of Islam in multitudes. All these aspects are mentioned in the previous *sūrahs*. The next *sūrah* also alludes to them and they will also be found in *Sūrah Naṣr*.

وَلَسَوْفَ يُعْطِيكَ رَبُّكَ فَتَرْضَىٰ (٥)⁴

Although it is not mentioned what the Almighty will give, however, intrinsic indications show that it refers to the *خَيْرٌ* whose glad tidings are given in the previous verse and which embraces all those successes and triumphs that were notched up by Islam in later years. Since these

3. And the coming period shall be better for you than the previous one.

4. And your Lord will give you so that you shall be pleased.

triumphs were yet to materialize, the second object of the verb يُعْطِيكَ has been suppressed in this verse; however, the word فَرَّضَى has hinted at the fact that the Almighty will bless him so much in this regard that he will become very happy. This one word comprehensively embraces what a whole book cannot encompass.

أَلَمْ يَجِدْكَ يَتِيمًا فَآوَى (٦) وَوَجَدَكَ ضَالًّا فَهَدَى (٧) وَوَجَدَكَ عَائِلًا فَأَغْنَى (٨)⁵

It is stated in verse four that the Prophet's future will be better than what he is encountering now. Here, in this verse, some examples are cited from the Prophet's life to emphasize this fact. He is asked to ponder on his own life to see a grand picture in this regard.

First of all, a reference is given to him being an orphan. Being an orphan is no less a problem in itself and if a society is also so uncaring about orphans as the Arab society was in those days, then an orphan is left with no place to go. The Qur'ān has described this aspect of the Arab society in the previous verses. Thus it is said: (١٧:٨٩) كَلَّا بَلْ لَا تُكْرِمُونَ الْيَتِيمَ (Nay! But you do not respect the orphans, (89:17)). Similarly, while referring to certain individuals of the Prophet's own family, it is said: (١٠٢:٢) فَذَلِكَ الَّذِي يَدُعُّ الْيَتِيمَ (he is the one who shoves the orphan, (102:2)).

However, in the case of the Prophet (sws), it was a sheer blessing on the part of the Almighty that though his father did not leave behind much of a legacy, his grandfather and after him, his paternal uncle brought him up with great respect and affection. In normal circumstances, it is not at all rare to find a grandfather and an uncle feeling affection for their orphaned grandson and nephew and in fact is an obvious requirement of human nature; however, in the morally bereft society of Arabia, the existence of such feelings was indeed rare and it would not have been possible unless the Almighty bestowed a reflection of His love on an orphan the way He did in the case of Moses (sws) so that he was brought up in the very palace of his greatest enemy: the Pharaoh.

The words وَوَجَدَكَ ضَالًّا فَهَدَى refer to the spiritual favour of the Almighty on the Prophet (sws) which he received in the later part of his life.

It is known that the Prophet's upright nature was not for a moment satisfied with the religious customs and traditions he inherited from his forefathers and there was no other guidance available also which could satisfy him. The condition of the followers of various divine religions that existed in his surroundings is apparent from Sūrah Baqarah, Sūrah Āl-i 'Imrān and other Madīnan sūrahs: such was the distorted shape of

5. Did He not find you an orphan and gave you shelter? And found you wandering and guided you? And found you in need and enriched you?

their faith and deeds that a person searching for the truth could not obtain any guidance from them. This situation had made him very anxious and this anxiety is referred to by the words **وَوَجَدَكَ ضَالًّا فَهَدَىٰ**. The word **ضَالًّا** here does not refer to a person who is led away from the truth; it refers to a person who is in search for the truth. The prophets of God have an upright nature even before they are given the responsibility of prophethood. Even in the early part of their lives they never deviate from the obvious norms of human nature; however, human nature can only guide a person in broad areas of faith and deeds. It cannot explain all the corollaries and consequences of all articles of faith nor is it capable enough to define the exact limits of all deeds and morals. Therefore even an upright person who lives by the guidance provided by his nature still needs to know the attributes of God and the requirements of faith in the attributes of the God on whose existence his heart bears evidence. He wants to know the obligations which he owes to His Creator and how he should discharge them. He also wants to know how he should lead his life in such a disciplined manner that even the distant aspects of his life are spent in subservience to God. Unless these questions are answered, a person does not receive real satisfaction and neither is he able to establish a relationship with the Almighty on the right footings. These were the questions which bombarded the Prophet (sws) in the phase of his life referred to by the words **وَوَجَدَكَ ضَالًّا**. Obviously this state of his can neither be regarded as of error nor of guidance. In precise words, this state of his reflects his effort to seek the truth. In other words, it is as if a person is standing on a crossroad and is unable to decide the path he should adopt. Before being given the responsibility of prophethood, the Prophet (sws) would be actually contemplating all these questions in the secluded cave of Hirā.

Some books do describe the state of people who were followers of the Dīn-i Ḥanīfī that some of these remained so perplexed that they would sit and lean against the walls of the Baytullāh and since there was no means for them to know the manner in which they could worship the Almighty, they would express their yearning to worship the Almighty the way He wanted. This must also be the situation the Prophet (sws) would have been facing until he was blessed with divine guidance. Consequently, the Qur'ān has referred to this state of the Prophet (sws) in the following words: **وَكَذَلِكَ أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ رُوحًا مِّنْ أَمْرِنَا مَا كُنْتَ تَدْرِي مَا الْكِتَابُ وَلَا الْإِيمَانُ وَلَكِن جَعَلْنَاهُ نُورًا نَّهْدِي بِهِ مَن نَّشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا (٥٢:٤٢)** (Thus have We inspired you with a spirit which is from among Our directives. Neither were you aware of the scripture nor of faith. But we made this revelation a light whereby We guide those of Our servants We desire, (42:52)). In Sūrah

Yūsuf, this state is expressed by the word غفلة in the verse وَإِنْ كُنْتُمْ مِنْ قَبْلِهِ لَمَنِ الْعَافِلِينَ (and indeed before this you were among those are not aware, (12:3)).

In the verse وَوَجَدَكَ عَائِلًا فَأَغْنَى the needy and affluent referred to are more related to the spiritual realm than the material one. If a person's heart is devoid of faith, then such a person is a needy person even if he has the treasures of the world, and if his heart is radiant with faith then he is a rich person even if he wears the clothes made from animal hides and lives on wild honey and locusts like the Prophet John (sws). It is to this reality that the famous adage الغنى غنى القلب (real affluence is the affluence of the heart) refers to. This real affluence is gained through faith, a true comprehension of the Almighty and through the light of guidance provided by the Book of God. He who has not been able to lay hands on this wealth can never quench his thirst for material wealth and he who is anxious for this wealth always yearns for more.

This world is a place of material resources and hence man is in need of these resources. If in some way the wealth of Khadijah (rta) was able to benefit the Prophet (sws), then this was her own good fortune and also that of her wealth which can seldom be achieved by any other person and by the wealth he possesses. However, the affluence referred to here is not achieved through wealth only as alluded to earlier; it is primarily a consequence of the guidance mentioned in the previous verse and whose real manifestation is the *sharḥ ṣadr* (inner satisfaction) whose details are afforded in the next *sūrah*, Sūrah Alam Nashrah, which forms a pair with Sūrah Duḥā. People who have regarded the affluence mentioned in this verse as the affluence attained on the basis of wealth have only been able to grasp the apparent; however, the reality in this regard is beyond the apparent – it cannot be seen; it can only be understood. Here I have contented myself with brief hints on this issue. In the last verse of this *sūrah*, and in Sūrah Alam Nashrah, I will discuss some of its veiled aspects.

فَأَمَّا الْيَتِيمَ فَلَا تَقْهَرْ (٩) وَأَمَّا السَّائِلَ فَلَا تَنْهَرْ (١٠) وَأَمَّا بِنِعْمَةِ رَبِّكَ فَحَدِّثْ (١١)⁶

This is a mention of the obligation one owes to the favours mentioned in the previous verses. The style adopted is actually a critical comment on people who have been described in previous *sūrahs* as those who instead of showing gratitude on the favours of God they have been blessed with arrogantly think that they were actually entitled to what

6. So, do not suppress the orphan and do not scold the one who asks and proclaim the favour of your Lord.

they have received. The Almighty counsels the Prophet (sws) that he should not adopt this attitude and just as He gave him refuge as an orphan, he should also give refuge to the orphans of the society, show affection to them and safeguard their rights. I have already explained under the verse (۱۹:۸۹) وَتَأْكُلُونَ الثَّرَاثَ أَكْثَلًا لِّمَا (and you greedily devour the inheritance of the weak, (89:19))⁷ that in pre-Islamic times powerful heirs and relatives would usurp the rights of weak heirs and orphans and would seize all the inheritance a person would leave behind. The words فَلَا تَفْهَرْ refer to this situation. They mean that the Prophet (sws) should not snub orphans and usurp their rights thinking them to be weak individuals of the society. It is obvious that the Prophet (sws) has not been admonished by these words because there was a possibility that he might commit such injustice; in fact, these words sound a warning in an indirect manner to the influential among the Quraysh who have been rebuked in the previous *sūrahs* for such violations of rights. But instead of reforming themselves, these people set about to oppose the Prophet (sws). In this *sūrah*, these people are ignored and the Prophet (sws) is told that whatever attitude they adopt they should be left to themselves; he must however protect the rights of the orphans.

The words وَأَمَّا السَّائِلَ فَلَا يَنْهَرْ state the right of the favour mentioned in the verse وَوَجَدَكَ ضَالًّا فَهَدَى. The word سَائِل (he who asks) here is not used in its limited meaning. It is used here rather comprehensively. Whether a person asks for food and clothing or for intellectual guidance or for religious guidance or of any other thing, he should be guided the utmost, and if this is not possible for some reason then the Prophet (sws) should express his inability in a very kind manner and never scold such people. The implication is that the Prophet (sws) should remember that he too underwent a period in his life when he was an embodiment of questions and these questions had severely bothered him; at last, the Almighty relieved him of all his worries and answered all his questions. This entails that the Prophet (sws) should also treat with kindness those who ask. He should not adopt the attitude of people who when blessed with riches treat the poor and needy with harshness and who when put through some trial say that the Almighty has humiliated them; at that time they do not remember how they themselves humiliated their own brethren.

The words وَأَمَّا بِنِعْمَةِ رَبِّكَ فَحَدِّثْ express the obligation imposed on the Prophet (sws) as a result of what is stated earlier in وَوَجَدَكَ غَائِلًا فَأَغْنَى. I have already referred to the fact that these words do not merely refer to

7. See: Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥī, *Tadabbur-i Qur'ān*, 2nd ed., vol. 9 (Lahore: Faran Foundation, 1986), 359.

the wealth which the Prophet (sws) became a beneficiary of after his marriage with Khadījah (rta); they primarily refer to the wisdom of religion and the treasure of *sharī'ah* which has majestically been referred to by the Qur'ān in the words: وَمَنْ يُؤْتَ الْحِكْمَةَ فَقَدْ أُوتِيَ خَيْرًا كَثِيرًا (٢٦٩:٢) (and he who is blessed with wisdom is indeed blessed with a treasure of great good). In the verse under discussion, one needs to focus one's direction specially on the word فَحَدِّثْ. This word is more appropriate for proclaiming the favour of wisdom rather than proclaiming the favour of wealth. The implication is that the Prophet (sws) should declare and proclaim the treasure of wisdom he has been blessed with from the Almighty: just as the Almighty has bestowed it on him free of charge, he too should distribute to others on a complimentary basis and communicate it to every person who comes to him and declare it before every gathering.

By the grace of God, I come to the end of this *sūrah's tafsīr*.

فَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ عَلَى إِحْسَانِهِ (gratitude be to God for His favour).

Lahore,

6th February 1980 AD

19th Rabī' al-Awwal 1400 AH

Sūrah Alam Nashrah

Central Theme and Relation with Previous Sūrah

This *sūrah*, along with Sūrah Ḍuḥā, the previous *sūrah*, forms a pair. It begins after Sūrah Ḍuḥā without any prior introduction, and the subject discussed in the verse: "Did We not find you an orphan and gave you shelter" (93:6) and in the subsequent verses of the previous *sūrah* is brought to completion in this *sūrah*. The only difference it seems is that in Sūrah Ḍuḥā the bounties and blessings of the Almighty, cited in order to comfort and assure the Prophet (sws), belonged to the period prior to his Prophethood and to that extending a little after it; whereas, in this *sūrah*, the favours which were showered by the gracious Lord on him when the message of Islam had spread in other parts of the Arabian peninsula are pointed out.

In the previous *sūrah*, the Prophet (sws) is given the glad tidings of a bright future as far as the extent of the propagation of the Islamic thought was concerned. This would overshadow the bleak present. The difficulties and hardships which he is facing are, according to the law of providence, only meant to train and discipline him. He would soon be relieved of them. In this *sūrah*, by making a reference to some such predictions which by then had shown clear signs to materialize, an emphatic assurance is given to the Prophet (sws). He is comforted that all his troubles and grievances will continue to give way to the happiness of success if he faces them with courage and determination.

Analysis of the Sūrah's Meanings

There is no ambiguity in the meanings of the *sūrah*. Initially a reference is made to the gift of *sharḥ-i ṣadr*, (inner satisfaction) which the Almighty had blessed the Prophet (sws) with in order to alleviate his mental worries. The Prophet (sws) is then consoled and solaced that just as in earlier times, every hardship was succeeded by ease and comfort, likewise, in the subsequent stages of this mission, the same pattern would continue. After this, an indication is made to the final phase of the completion of this mission with a mention of the method to benefit from its successes and triumphs.

Meaning of the Sūrah

أَلَمْ نَشْرَحْ لَكَ صَدْرَكَ (١) وَوَضَعْنَا عَنْكَ وِزْرَكَ (٢) الَّذِي أَنْقَضَ ظَهْرَكَ (٣) وَرَفَعْنَا لَكَ ذِكْرَكَ (٤) فَإِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا (٥) إِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا (٦) فَإِذَا فَرَغْتَ فَانصَبْ (٧) وَإِلَى رَبِّكَ فَارْغَبْ (٨)

Have We not opened your heart, and relieved you of the burden which weighed down heavily on your back, and raised your voice? (1-4)

So, with every difficulty there is relief; indeed, with every difficulty there is relief. (5-6)

Therefore, when your task is over, prepare yourself and with fervour seek your Lord. (7-8)

Explanation of the Sūrah

أَلَمْ نَشْرَحْ لَكَ صَدْرَكَ (١) وَوَضَعْنَا عَنْكَ وِزْرَكَ (٢)¹

In the explanation of the previous *sūrah*, a detailed account of the mental worries and anxieties which the Prophet (sws) had been facing in the early period is given. In the period just before prophethood, these worries were a result of his wanderings in quest for the truth, while in the early period of prophethood they were caused by a scarcity of followers and supporters of the religion he had begun to preach. Also a bright future, better than the past and present, with regard to the acceptance of his message was predicted with the assurance that the difficulties he was encountering were only transient in nature and the Almighty would soon relieve him of their burden. Later on, when divine revelations had appeased his apprehensions and the truth was exposed to educate and further encourage him, the Almighty revealed His unchanging law of trial which every inviter towards virtue faces if he is to succeed in his mission. The law is in fact the real subject of the *sūrah* and is stated near its end in verses five and six: “With every difficulty there is relief.”

To open someone's heart means to create in him a correct comprehension of the truth which is the outcome of true belief. This is also a means to develop in a person trust and faith in God, which is the fountain head of resolve and determination. With such a strong faith no impediment, however great it may be, can waver his stand and without it not even an impediment is needed to defeat his will.

The sentence وَوَضَعْنَا عَنْكَ وِزْرَكَ (and have We not relieved you of your burden?) is co-ordinated in meaning with the first, and hence is translated keeping in view that the interrogative particle أَلَمْ (Is it not

1. Have We not opened your heart and relieved you of the burden?

that...) of the first verse governs this second verse also. In Sūrah Nabā also, this style is adopted.

الَّذِي أَنْقَضَ ظَهْرَكَ (٣)²

This verse qualifies the word وَزُرُّ (burden) stated in the previous verse. By وَزُرُّ is implied the severe perplexity the Prophet (sws) was in when, prior to his prophethood, he was seeking the truth but to no avail. Later, when the Almighty revealed it to him his troubles merely changed shape as all his people turned against him.

There is no overstatement in the fact that the Prophet's troubles were breaking his back. The way the Almighty had provided him with guidance quite naturally induced him to think that if one soul was able to appreciate and understand it why was it that others were finding a difficulty in accepting it. Moreover, he saw that the more effort he made in calling them towards it, the more they evaded his calls. As result, he was driven into thinking that probably his efforts were lacking both in approach and intensity since the desired results were not being produced. This led him to double his efforts, but when even then the situation did not change, his worries increased twofold. Furthermore, if in these circumstances a delay occurred in between revelations then, again such a deference multiplied his worries, making him think that the real cause of the delay might be the Almighty's displeasure. To remove all these fears and to comfort and encourage the Prophet (sws), this sūrah was revealed. In Sūrah Tāha, also, the Prophet (sws) is assured in a similar manner:

طه مَا أَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْكَ الْقُرْآنَ لِتَشْقَىٰ إِلَّا تَذَكُّرٌ لِّمَن يَخْشَىٰ (٢٠:١-٣)

This is Sūrah Tāhā. We have not revealed the Qur'ān upon you to distress you. It is only an admonition for the God fearing. (20:1-3)

وَرَفَعْنَا لَكَ ذِكْرَكَ (٤)³

This simply comforts the Prophet (sws) by asserting that his once feeble voice has now become a reverberating roar. The word لَكَ (for you [only]), as in the first verse, expresses the exclusive nature of help provided by the Almighty to the Prophet (sws).

The verse also helps us in ascertaining the time of revelation of the sūrah as when the message of Islam had penetrated in the surrounding areas of Arabia. It should be borne in mind that the leaders of the Quraysh,

2. Which weighed down heavily on your back?

3. And raised your voice?

who were the first invitees of this religion, persisted in opposing it. However, during *hajj*, the pilgrims who came to Ka'bah became a constant source of spreading its teachings in the whereabouts of Makkah, particularly among the Anṣār of Madīnah. Subsequently, it reached the far flung areas of Arabia and then infiltrated into other countries. Such was the extent of its tide that it was not difficult for someone to imagine that this voice was not to be silenced and soon a hitherto feeble call would become a deafening uproar and that before long every nook and corner of Arabia would resound with the cries of Allāhu Akbar.

فَإِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا (٥) إِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا (٦)⁴

This is the real lesson which is meant to be given in the light of the above mentioned references, and which actually is the central theme of the *sūrah*. The Prophet (sws) is addressed and asked to ponder over the persistence of the Almighty during the course of his mission. When he has witnessed that every hardship is followed by relief, then he should bear all afflictions with patience, for only after passing through such trying circumstances would he taste the fruit of success. In the previous *sūrah*, the consistency in application of this law of trial is proven by citing examples both from natural surroundings and from some experiences from the Prophet's life, while in this *sūrah*, only some experiences of the Prophet's life are included to demonstrate the law and make the matter more effective.

An important aspect that should be kept in mind is that the verses are not repeated merely to emphasise the point, as most commentators contend. The repetition only stresses that difficulty and ease co-exist and follow each other in an eternally periodic sequence. After surmounting one peak no one should rest assured that his remaining life would be spent on a smooth terrain. In fact, a series of such peaks might have to be overcome if he has to succeed in life. He should always be prepared to scale every summit that comes his way -- for life is the name of a relentless struggle. Every passenger of this journey must brave the storm of its vicissitudes if he is to reach his destination. The Almighty has decreed the same law for those who tread the path of truth. Those who intend to trudge through it will have to make their own way and struggle through every inch they trek. But the Almighty has guaranteed one thing: if in spite of all these obstacles and hindrances they remain steadfast, muster all their strength to combat every test they are put through, He

4. So, with every difficulty there is relief; indeed, with every difficulty there is relief.

shall bring ease after every difficulty, and reinvigorate them to continue this remorseless journey till the ultimate destination is reached.

The philosophy behind this test has at many instances been stated in the Qur'ān. By its means, the Almighty discriminates between the righteous and the hypocrites and the believers from the disbelievers so that everyone can be rewarded or punished according to his deeds, and that no one is able to complain that he was the victim of injustice. Without this test the good cannot be distinguished from the evil to the extent that no one is able to refute the fate he deserves.

فَإِذَا فَرَغْتَ فَانصَبْ (٧) وَإِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ فَارْغَبْ (٨)⁵

This verse directs the Prophet (sws) to prepare for the ultimate destination. The verb *نَصَبَ* means “to prepare” and “to work hard”. The Prophet (sws) is told that after he successfully overcomes the obstacles which come in way of the mission, and when the Almighty showers His help, and when Makkah is conquered once again and when the enemies are humbled once and for all and when the people embrace Islam in large numbers, he should totally converge all his efforts and turn all his attentions to earnestly seek the Almighty. In other words, two aspects are highlighted in these verses: First, they bring glad tidings to the Prophet (sws) that he shall soon successfully complete his mission. Second, they assert that even after accomplishing the mission he should continue with more fervour, and direct all his energies and efforts in seeking the Almighty and prepare for the final journey which will bring him to the Creator of the heavens and the earth.

In complying with this final directive, the Prophet (sws) began to spend more and more time in worship. Such was the extent of his involvement that some people even inquired from him the reason for taking so much pains in worship when all his sins had been forgiven. The Prophet (sws) is said to have replied: “Should not I become a grateful servant of my Lord.” In Sūrah Naṣr, an elaborate treatment is given to this topic:

إِذَا جَاءَ نَصْرُ اللَّهِ وَالْفَتْحُ وَرَأَيْتَ النَّاسَ يَدْخُلُونَ فِي دِينِ اللَّهِ أَفْوَاجًا فَسَبِّحْ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّكَ وَاسْتَغْفِرْهُ إِنَّهُ كَانَ تَوَّابًا (١١٠: ٣-١)

When comes the help of God and victory and you see men embrace the religion of God in multitudes, celebrate the praises of your Lord and seek His forgiveness. He is ever disposed to mercy. (110: 1-3)

5. So, when your task is over, prepare yourself and with fervour seek your Lord.

Sūrah Tīn

Central Theme, Relationship with Previous *Sūrah* and Sequence of Discourse

The central theme of this *sūrah* is to validate reward and punishment. The *sūrah* begins with a mention of the important places of this world where prophets of God were sent. This mention is in the form of oaths. Qur'ānic oaths, we know, are meant to bear witness to a premise. Here this premise is that man has been created in the best of moulds, with the finest of natures and with outstanding qualities. However, the law of the Almighty for a man to remain at such excellence and to strengthen his qualities is that those who embrace faith and do righteous deeds and bear every hardship they encounter in the cause of God, they will receive a great reward for their efforts. As far as those people are concerned who, because of their egotism and slackness, do not exercise strength and courage to surmount the difficulties they face in the cause of God, the Almighty will leave them to wander on the path they have adopted and in the end they would fall in a pit which is destined for such people.

Here it would be useful if readers take a look at my explanation of verses 92:5-7 and 94:5 of the last two paired-*sūrahs*.¹ These verses also discuss the same subject as is discussed in this *sūrah*. This study will also further elaborate the relationship between the preceding and succeeding *sūrahs*.

At the end of this *sūrah*, it is stated that this dealing of God with His servants is based right on truth and justice. If He does not do so, then this would mean that the righteous and the evil doers are equal in His eyes. This of course is evidently incorrect. The God who has given a person the awareness between good and evil should be the foremost to distinguish good from evil and should deal with each in a manner it is worthy of.

Further down, Sūrah 'Āṣr also discusses this subject. If it is kept in consideration, it will be easier to ascertain the stress of this *sūrah* as well:

وَالْعَصْرِ إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لَفِي خُسْرٍ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَتَوَّصُوا بِالْحَقِّ

1. There seems to be an obvious omission here. As per Iṣlāhī's own scheme *sūrahs* 92 (Alam Nashrah) and 93 (Duḥā) form a pair and not *sūrahs* 92 (Alam Nashrah) and 94 (Layl). (Translator)

وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ (١٠٣: ١-٣)

Time bears witness that man is in a state of loss except those who embraced faith and did righteous deeds and urged one another to the truth and urged one another to patience. (103:1-3)

Text and Translation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَالَّتَيْنِ وَالزَّيْتُونِ (١) وَطُورِ سِينِينَ (٢) وَهَذَا الْبَلَدِ الْأَمِينِ (٣) لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي أَحْسَنِ تَقْوِيمٍ (٤) ثُمَّ رَدَدْنَاهُ أَسْفَلَ سَافِلِينَ (٥) إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ فَلَهُمْ أَجْرٌ غَيْرُ مَمْنُونٍ (٦) فَمَا يُكَذِّبُكَ بَعْدُ بِالذِّينِ (٧) أَلَيْسَ اللَّهُ بِأَحْكَمَ الْحَاكِمِينَ (٨)

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Ever Merciful.

The mount of Figs and the mount of Olives and the mount of Sinai and this peaceful city bear witness. (1-3)

That We have created man in the finest of moulds. Then We reverted him to the lowest position when he himself wanted to become low. Except those who embraced faith and did righteous deeds. So, for them shall be a reward unending. (4-6)

Now what is it on the basis of which you deny the Day of Judgement? Is not God the greatest of Judges? (7-8)

Explanation

وَالَّتَيْنِ وَالزَّيْتُونِ (١)²

The word وَ here signifies an oath. I have explained at various places in this exegesis that oaths sworn by various objects and places in the Qur'ān are meant to bear witness to a premise which is stated after the oath. Our exegetes have erroneously concluded that the word اللَّيْنِ signifies the fig which is of course a dry-fruit. On the contrary, it refers to the mount of Figs which is a famous source for producing figs. The relevant portion of the research conducted by Imām Farāhī in his *tafsīr* on this word is reproduced below:³

تَيْنِ is the name of a specific mountain on which figs are produced in abundance and hence it came to be known by this name. The Arabs knew it by this name. Naming objects in such a manner was very

2. The mount of Figs and the mount of Olives bear witness.

3. Farāhī, *Majmū'ah Tafāsīr*, 2nd ed. (Lahore: Faran Foundation, 1998), 311.

common among them. They would name a place after something which was produced in abundance in it. Places are called by the names شجرة غضى and نخلة for this very reason ...

Nābighah Dhubyānī has mentioned the word تَيْن in his couplets as the name of a place:

صُهَبَ الضَّلَالِ أَتَيْنَ التَّيْنَ عَنْ عُرْضِ
يُزْجِنُ غَيْمًا قَلِيلًا مَاءُهُ شَيْمًا

Here by the word fig, he has referred to a mountain in the south. Some people say that this mountain is between Ḥalwān and Ḥamdān.

Further down, while negating certain conjectures about this word, he presents his definite opinion in the following words:⁴

It is evident from this that تَيْن either implies the mount of Jūdī or some other mountain near it. It is mentioned in the Torah that after the great flood in the time of Noah (sws) it was this place from where mankind scattered to various places and it is evident from the Qur'ān that this incident took place near the mount Jūdī.

Similarly, the word زيتون does not signify the olive or the tree which produces this fruit, as has been understood by our exegetes: It refers to the mount of Olives which is famous for being the centre of Jesus' (sws) preaching and worship. It is mentioned in the Gospels very frequently. Imām Farāhī writes:⁵

In my opinion, this is also the name of a site. Since olives were produced in abundance at this place, the Arabs named it so. We have already referred to this customary practice of theirs. It is indeed the same mountain which is frequently mentioned in the Gospels. Jesus (sws) would go there to worship and supplicate before the Almighty. It is mentioned thus in the Gospel according to Luke:

And in the day time he was teaching in the temple; and at night he went out, and abode in the mount that is called the mount of Olives. (21:37)

This opinion is also corroborated by early authorities. Ibn 'Abbās

4. Ibid., 312.

5. Ibid.

(rta) and Ka‘b (rta) say that olives refers to the Bayt al-Maqdis and Qatādah says that by olives is meant the mountain where the Bayt al-Maqdis is situated.

وَطُورِ سَيْنِينَ (٢) وَهَذَا الْبَلَدِ الْأَمِينِ (٣)^٦

It is obvious that the “mount” of Sinai and “this secure city” refer to certain places. However, while presenting his research on the word سَيْنِينَ which was actually سَيْنَا, Imām Farāhī writes:⁷

At one place in the Qur’ān, occur the words سَيْنَا طُور (٢٠ : ٢٣). In other words, at one place it is in the feminine gender and at another, plural (جمع سالم). This is similar to the Arabic أَجْمَعُونَ and جَمْعًا. In the Hebrew Torah, at some places we find سَيْنَا and at others سَيْنِيم and it is known that suffix يُم is an indication for a plural noun.

The expression الْبَلَدِ الْأَمِينِ obviously refers to Makkah. However, the question does arise that why was this name not directly taken and why was it mentioned in the form of an attribute. We shall answer this question later when the relationship between the objects of oath (*muqsam bihī*) and the complement of oath (*muqsam ‘alayh*) shall be explained.

لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي أَحْسَنِ تَقْوِيمٍ (٤) ثُمَّ رَدَدْنَاهُ أَسْفَلَ سَافِلِينَ (٥) إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ فَلَهُمْ أَجْرٌ غَيْرُ مَمْنُونٍ (٦)^٨

These verses mention the premise which is validated by the oaths sworn in the previous verses. The Almighty has indeed created man in the finest of moulds and His law and practice is that those who value this favour and strengthen their innate guidance and then after accepting the call of the messengers of God profess faith and do righteous deeds are blessed with eternal reward by Him. However, those who do not value this innate guidance are deprived of faith and righteous deeds and shall be thrown by the Almighty in the very pit from which He wanted to save them by bestowing this favour on them.

6. And the mount of Sinai and this peaceful city bear witness.

7. Farāhī, *Majmū‘ah Tafāsīr*, 312-313. We have already explained in this *tafsīr* that in Arabic, a plural noun, at times denotes its vastness of size. It seem that this same usage also exists in Hebrew.

8. That We have created man in the finest of moulds. Then We reverted him to the lowest [position] when he himself wanted to become low. Except those who accepted faith and did righteous deeds. For them shall be a reward unending.

The literal meaning of the word تَقْوِيمٌ is to straighten something, for example if it is said: قَوْمْتُ الرُّمَحَ فَاسْتَقَامَ it would mean “when I straightened the spear, it straightened”. From this primary meaning, this word came to imply “making something apt and suitable for a certain purpose.”

At many places in the Qur’ān, it is said that man has not been created without a purpose. He has been created for a great purpose (بِالْحَقِّ). This purpose is that man should lead a life in this world which is a place of trial whilst shielding himself from the lures of Satan and his agents and remain on the straight path to which he has been guided by God. If he does so, the Almighty will grant him an eternal kingdom and if he deviates from this straight path by being lured away by Satan or by being intimidated by him, then the Almighty will let him wander in the abyss of destruction that he chose for himself. The Almighty has created man in the finest of moulds keeping in view this purpose. His external appearance and structure also show that he is the best of God’s creation and his innate qualities also are so great that amongst the creation of this world only he was considered worthy of them. In the previous *sūrahs*, it is mentioned in various styles that he has been blessed with the awareness of good and evil. It is also mentioned that by nature he has a liking for good and an abhorrence for evil. It is also indicated at various places that he is blessed with intellect and intention and is not deprived of them like other creatures. All this bears evidence that he has been bestowed with all the essential qualities to fulfill the purpose for which he has been created.

The sentence ثُمَّ رَدَدْنَاهُ أَسْفَلَ سَافِلِينَ (then We reverted him to the lowest [position] when he himself wanted to become low) is a reference to a law and practice of the Almighty regarding human beings. Since man has been given the freedom to exercise his intention and will, it depends upon his own attitude whether he remains the best of God’s creation or reverts to a lowly state. If he values and honours his position as the best of God’s creation, the Almighty helps him rise even higher and if he does not do so and lapses into lowliness, then the Almighty too propels him into humiliation and the end result is that he falls into the pit of Hell depriving himself of all the favours of God.

The word أَسْفَلَ is an adverb of place (ظرف) and the word سَافِلِينَ is an accusative of state (حال) from the accusative pronoun in رَدَدْنَاهُ. It is evident from this syntactical analysis that the Almighty plunges a person into disgrace because that person is inclined to it and does not have the determination to achieve the higher ideals of life.

A question can arise here: The word سَافِلِينَ is plural; how can it be regarded as an accusative of state from a pronoun which is singular? The answer to this question is that though the pronoun is singular, it refers to

al-insān which refers to a genre and hence is effectively plural. Consequently, both singular and plural pronouns are used for it in the Qur'ān.

The exception stated in the sentence *إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ فَلَهُمْ أَجْرٌ غَيْرُ مَمْنُونٍ* actually depicts the qualities of people who are protected by the Almighty from this disgrace: those who value and honour themselves as the best of God's creation and are blessed with faith and the urge to do righteous deeds are not humiliated by God; on the contrary, they are given honour and respect and are blessed with eternal reward in an eternal life by Him.

We have already explained the meaning of the expression *غَيْرُ مَمْنُونٍ* at some place in this *tafsīr*. It refers to something ceaseless and unending. Some people have interpreted it in a different way; however, this is against the grammatical principles of Arabic.

After ascertaining the real claim, let us now see how the previously mentioned oaths bear evidence to it.

The Evidence borne by the Mount of Figs on Retribution

The first object sworn by is the mount of Figs and it has been reasoned out earlier that it refers to the mount of Jūdī. Two important incidents which depict the Almighty's law of retribution took place on it and their details are found in ancient scriptures: the incident involving Adam (sws) and the incident involving Noah (sws) and his people. While describing the first of these, Imām Farāhī writes:⁹

The mounts of Figs is the first place in which the first instance of worldly retribution from the Almighty took place. The details of this incident are that when Adam (sws) forgot his covenant with God and ate the fruit of the forbidden tree after being lured by Satan, his envious enemy, he and his wife were faced with the Almighty's law of retribution. They were deprived of the success they had been blessed with by the Almighty and were divested of their apparel of Paradise ... this whole incident was regarded to be a memorable one for all their progeny. Consequently, mankind has been reminded of it in various places of the Qur'ān in this capacity: *يَا بَنِي آدَمَ لَا يَفْتِنَنَّكُمُ الشَّيْطَانُ كَمَا أَخْرَجَ أَبَوَيْكُم مِّنَ الْجَنَّةِ يَنزِعُ عَنْهُمَا لِبَاسَهُمَا* (۲۷:۷) (Children of Adam! Let not Satan tempt you the way he had had your parents turned out of Paradise stripping them of their garments, (7:27)).

Here, it should also be kept in consideration that it is mentioned in

9. Farāhī, *Majmū'ah Tafāṣīr*, 314.

the Torah that once Adam and Eve were divested of their apparel in Paradise, the leaves of the tree with which they covered their bodies was the fig tree.

After this incident is mentioned in the Qur'ān, it is stated that both Adam and Eve repented and the Almighty accepted their repentance and promised to reveal guidance to them and to reward those who would follow this guidance. After the first covenant, this was the second which the Almighty took from Adam. It is evident from this that the incident which took place on the mount of Figs has two aspects in it: In it, on the one hand, the Almighty deprived Adam of one of His favours and blessed him with another great favour. He was deprived of the first favour because he had forgotten his promise with God and blessed them with another because he realized his folly and repented before God.

The second incident of retribution that took place near the mount of Figs happened in the time of Noah (sws). Imām Farāhī has explained it thus:¹⁰

In his times, the Almighty destroyed the wrongdoers near this mountain and saved the righteous from the flood and blessed them. The Qur'ān says:

وَقِيلَ يَا أَرْضُ ابْلَعِي مَاءَكِ وَيَا سَّمَاءُ أَقْلِعِي وَغِيضَ الْمَاءِ وَقُضِيَ الْأَمْرُ وَاسْتَوَتْ عَلَى
الْجُودِيِّ وَقِيلَ بُعْداً لِلْقَوْمِ الظَّالِمِينَ (٤٤:١١)

And it was commanded: “Earth, absorb your waters. Heavens, cease your rain!” The water went down and the matter was concluded and the ark came to rest upon al-Jūdī, and it was declared: “Destruction for the evil-doers.” (11:44)

Later, in response to Noah's prayer, he was directed thus:

قِيلَ يَا نُوحُ اهْبِطْ بِسَلَامٍ مِنَّا وَبَرَكَاتٍ عَلَيْكَ وَعَلَى أُمَمٍ مِّمَّنْ مَعَكَ وَأُمَّمٌ سَنُمْتُّهُمْ
ثُمَّ يَمَسُّهُمْ مِنَّا عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ (٤٨:١١)

It was said: “Noah disembark with peace from Us and Our blessings are upon you and on the nations which are with you. And besides yours there shall be other nations also which We will allow to flourish for sometime. Then our deadly torment will seize them.” (11:48)

10. Ibid., 314-315.

... It is evident from this that the mount of Figs is an important place where the law of retribution of the Almighty manifested itself.

The Evidence borne by the Mount of Olives on Retribution

The details of the incident which took place on the mount of Olives are presented thus by Imām Farāhī:¹¹

It was on this mountain that the Almighty took away His *sharīah* from the Jews and gave it to the other branch of the progeny of Abraham (sws). This incident took place in the final years of Jesus (sws). It is evident from its details which are mentioned in the Gospels that one day he pleaded and beseeched God all night that the ship of his people (the Jews) be saved from being drowned. However, the judgement of fate was unassailable. Finally, he lost all hope in the future of his people specially when he came to know that the Jews were after his life. This hurt him even more because he knew that if they tried to kill him, they would be cursed by God in accordance with His law and He would take away His trust from them and give to some others. The Bible records:

Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures, ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This was the Lord’s doing, and it is amazing in our eyes.’”

This is a statement from the Psalms (118:22-23). Jesus (sws), while referring to it, explained it thus:

Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed. (Matthew 21:43-44)

The Jews were divested of their Heavenly Kingdom at the mount of Figs. The Gospels have recorded this incident in detail.

The Evidence borne by the Mount Sinai on Retribution

While explaining the evidence borne by the mount of Sinai, Imām Farāhī writes:¹²

The nature of the evidence borne by the mount of Sinai is very

11. Ibid., 315.

12. Ibid., 319-320.

evident. It is at this place that the Almighty turned in mercy to a very oppressed nation and as a reward for their patience delivered it from the clutches of its enemy and then later blessed it with a *sharī'ah* which was a torment and punishment for their enemies and for those who had denied the truth. This incident is a very clear example of God showering His favours on the oppressed and of His punishing the wrongdoers. References to this can be seen in the Qur'ān where the incident of the Pharaoh and his people and Moses (sws) is mentioned. For example:

وَتَمَّتْ كَلِمَتُ رَبِّكَ الْحُسْنَىٰ عَلَىٰ بَنِي إِسْرَآئِيلَ بِمَا صَبَرُوا وَدَمَّرْنَا مَا كَانَ يَصْنَعُ
فِرْعَوْنُ وَقَوْمُهُ وَمَا كَانُوا يَعْرِشُونَ (١٣٧:٧)

And thus was your Lord's gracious promise fulfilled for the Israelites because they showed perseverance and We destroyed the buildings the Pharaoh and his people used to make a well as their orchards. (7:137)

Imām Farāhī has dealt at length with the details of this oath and I have contented myself on brief excerpts from it. Those interested in the details should consult his exegesis

The Evidence borne by the Secure City

The words "secure city" obviously refer to Makkah because the Almighty has made it safe and secure. Thus it is said about it: وَمَنْ دَخَلَهُ (and whoever enters it is safe, (3:97)). When Abraham (sws) had migrated to it with his people who were pagans, it was uninhabited and unsecure. Abraham (sws) prayed to the Almighty to bless it with sustenance and peace which He accepted. As a result, the area became abundant in sustenance and food and it also became a sanctuary of peace. The Qur'ān thus said: فَلْيَعْبُدُوا رَبَّ هَذَا الْبَيْتِ الَّذِي أَطْعَمَهُمْ (so, they should worship the Lord of this House who fed them in hunger and provided them with peace in fear, (106:3-4)). This favour was bestowed upon Abraham (sws) for the sacrifices he gave and the bravery he displayed for the cause of monotheism. Later when he succeeded in an even greater trial – the trial of sacrificing his son – the Almighty blessed him with an even greater favour: the leadership of other nations of the world. At that time, Abraham (sws) had asked the Almighty if this reward of leadership would also be received by his progeny. The Almighty had replied that this promise of his does not relate to people who are incriminated with

polytheism and disbelief and thus wrong their souls. The implication was that the reward received by Abraham (sws) was because of his valour and faithfulness and only those of his descendents would have a share in this reward who follow his ways. Those who would deviate from his ways will meet the same fate which such people are destined to meet as per the law of retribution of the Almighty. The Qur'ān says:

وَإِذِ ابْتَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ رَبُّهُ بِكَلِمَاتٍ فَأَتَمَّهُنَّ قَالَ إِنِّي جَاعِلُكَ لِلنَّاسِ إِمَامًا قَالَ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِي قَالَ لَا يَنَالُ عَهْدِي الظَّالِمِينَ (٢: ١٢٤)

And recall when Abraham was put to trial by His Lord in a few things and he fulfilled them. He said: "I will appoint you the leader of mankind." "And from my descendants also?" asked Abraham. "My promise will not apply to those who wrong their souls." (2:124)

It is evident from these details that not only is this place a witness to the Almighty's law of retribution, the Almighty has also made a proclamation from this place of His practice that who would be regarded worthy of His blessings and who would face His wrath and anger.

A question does arise here about the sequence in which these places are mentioned. Imām Farāhī answers this question thus:¹³

The sequence adopted here is based on the principle of similarity. First the incident involving Adam (sws) is mentioned because it historically precedes everything. Then Jesus (sws) is mentioned because of the similarity which exists between Adam (sws) and Jesus (sws) and which the Qur'ān has clearly referred to in the following words: (Jesus is like Adam in the sight of God, (3:59)) ... after this are mentioned two places which relate to Moses (sws) and Muḥammad (sws) and the similarity which exists between these two messengers of God is also obvious from the Qur'ān. Consequently, after addressing the Quraysh, it says:

إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَا إِلَيْكُمْ رَسُولًا شَاهِدًا عَلَيْكُمْ كَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا إِلَىٰ فِرْعَوْنَ رَسُولًا (٧٣: ١٥)

To you We have sent forth a Messenger as a witness upon you just as we sent a Messenger to the Pharaoh. (73:15)

In the Torah, this similarity is also evident in the prediction of the advent of Muḥammad (sws):

13. Ibid., 326.

I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put My words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. If anyone does not listen to My words that the prophet speaks in My name, I myself will call him to account. (Deuteronomy, 18:18-19)

فَمَا يُكَذِّبُكَ بَعْدُ بِالذِّينِ (٧) أَلَيْسَ اللَّهُ بِأَحْكَمَ الْحَاكِمِينَ (٨)¹⁴

Imām Farāhī has interpreted the verse فَمَا يُكَذِّبُكَ بَعْدُ بِالذِّينِ in the following way:¹⁵

There are two opinions regarding the interpretation of this verse:

First: O man! What is that belies you in the matter of retribution after all these clear testimonies. Mujāhid has adopted this view. When he was asked that the addressee of this verse is Muḥammad (sws), he replied: “God forbid, how is this possible; it addresses mankind.” Zamakhasharī is also of this opinion; however, he regards the word تَكْذِيبُ in يُكَذِّبُكَ to mean حَمَلَ عَلَى التَّكْذِيبِ (to induce someone to deny). If this meaning is proven in this word, then this interpretation is very clear. However, he has not presented any corroboratory evidence for this meaning.

Second: O Prophet! What is that belies you about retribution. Farrā’ is of this opinion. In this interpretation. the words are understood to have their conventional meanings and there is no deviation in this regard; however, a little deliberation shows that context and placement do not accept this interpretation. Firstly, one fails to understand the reason for which the Prophet (sws) has been addressed by way of interrogative sentences. Secondly, the emphasis in فَمَا يُكَذِّبُكَ and the stress in بَعْدُ is totally lost if this interpretation is accepted. The interpretation adopted by Mujāhid is closer to the context. The word is interpreted in its conventional meaning and two solid interpretations result as per the two meanings of the word:

First, O Man! After these testimonies and arguments, what is the testimony that belies your belief about reward and punishment. In this case, the addressee of the verse is man and those who believe in

14. Now what is it on the basis of which you deny the Day of Judgement? Is not Allah the greatest of Judges?

15. Farāhī, *Majmū‘ah Tafāsīr*, 331-332.

reward and punishment will be strengthened by these words and those who are hesitant about reward and punishment will be induced to reflect on it.

One also needs to deliberate on the effective use of the interrogative particle مَا. It indicates the fact that man has always adopted the path of denial because of blind following and stubbornness. He finds no arguments to support him in this matter. There is not a single thing from among this whole world of arguments and reasoning which can negate reward and punishment. Thus man is asked to deliberate on facts and give up the attitude of blind following and see if there is even a single thing which is negating the belief of reward and punishment.

Second, after the evidence of these incidents and arguments what are the superstitions and desires which are deceiving mankind about reward and punishment.

In this case, the address would be directed at the rejecters. There are many examples in the Qur'ān of such an address. For example:

يَا أَيُّهَا الْإِنْسَانُ مَا غَرَّبَكَ رَبِّكَ الْكَرِيمَ (٨٢: ٦)

Man! What is it that has deceived you about your munificent Lord.
(82:6)

Imām Farāhī explains the purport of both these interrogative sentences thus:¹⁶

The purport of the first interrogative sentence in the case of both interpretations is: After a delineation of so many arguments in favour of reward and punishment, man should affirm his belief in it and should protect himself from doubts which arise within him or are raised by others in this matter.

The purport of the second interrogative sentence is that people should acknowledge reward and punishment because they are a corollary of the attributed of the Almighty. Thus what is meant to be conveyed is: Is not the Almighty the greatest of rulers? Then how is it possible that He will leave man without taking account from him and not discriminate between the righteous among them from the evil: (أَفَتَجْعَلُ الْمُسْلِمِينَ كَالْمُجْرِمِينَ مَا لَكُمْ كَيْفَ تَحْكُمُونَ (٦٨: ٣٥-٣٦) (Are

16. Ibid., 332.

We to regard the obedient and the evil-doers to be equal. What has come over you? What is this judgement you make?

It needs to be kept in consideration that the special feature of man being created in the finest of moulds – as stated in the earlier verses – is that he has been blessed with the awareness of good and evil and he likes justice and dislikes injustice. An obvious requirement of this is that liking justice and disliking injustice should be found to the ultimate extent in the Almighty – who is the Creator of man. Then it becomes evident from this that this attribute of the Almighty makes it incumbent upon Him that He should bring a day in which He justly decides the outcome of deeds of His creation and that as a result He reward the righteous and punish the wicked. If He does not do this, then He is not أَحْكَمُ الْحَاكِمِينَ (the greatest of all judges) even though He obviously is; one cannot reject this attribute of His.

A greater part of the *tafsīr* of this *sūrah* just presented has been adapted from Imām Farāhī's Arabic *tafsīr* of this *sūrah*. At times I have elaborated his views a little more and at others I have summarized them. By the grace of God, I have come to the end of this *tafsīr* now.

فَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ عَلَى فَضْلِهِ وَإِحْسَانِهِ (so gratitude be to God for His blessings and favours).

Lahore,

24th February, 1980

7th Rabī' al-Thānī, 1400 AH

Sūrah ‘Alaq

Central Theme and Relationship with Previous *Sūrah*

This *sūrah* is the counterpart of Sūrah Tīn, the previous *sūrah*. There is no basic difference between the central themes of both *sūrahs*. In the previous *sūrah*, it was shown through historical facts and through the perfection found in the way man has been created that the real path of salvation is that man should profess faith and do righteous deeds. People who do not adopt this path are destined to be doomed and they themselves are responsible for this fate. In the light of this premise, the Quraysh and its leaders are warned in this *sūrah* that instead of adopting the right path they have chosen to go on the opposite path. The Almighty has revealed His book as a favour and blessing to guide them but such is the extent of their arrogance and haughtiness that they are after the life of the very person who is trying to lead them to faith and righteous deeds. So much so, if this person offers the prayer to His God, these wretched people do not even tolerate this and try to stop him by force.

Analysis of the Sequence of Discourse

Verses (1-5): The Prophet (sws) has been directed to read out the Qur’ān to these people in the name of His Lord Who is the Creator of the whole world. Such is the exalted nature of this Book that it is incumbent upon them to follow it. The Almighty has created man from a clot of congealed blood and He also has full power to re-create him. He should read out this Book to them and remind them of the favour of the Almighty whereby He made arrangements for the education and instruction of these unlettered people through the pen and the written word and instructed them about things they did not know.

Verses (6-8): The leaders of the Quraysh are rebuked on their haughtiness that their conceit in their wealth and status have made them indifferent to God even though one day everyone shall be called to account before Him.

Verses (9-13): The haughty who would stop the Prophet (sws) from praying are especially warned and threatened. In a very angry tone, they are asked that if this servant of God is rightly guided or is telling something related to piety and these rebellious people are rejecting him and showing indifference to him, then ...! The implication is that such

people should fully contemplate what their fate would be.

Verses (14-18): More rage and fury is expressed at the attitude of these rebellious people. They are rebuked on this behavior. Are they not in their senses that the Almighty is observing all their impertinent activities? If they will not refrain from their insolence, a Day is fast approaching when He shall drag these wretched and errant people by their forelocks.

Verse (19): The Prophet (sws) is urged to show perseverance and forbearance and to disregard the pranks of these rebellious people. He should prostrate and become close to the Almighty.

Text and Translation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
 اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ (١) خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ (٢) اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ
 (٣) الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ (٤) عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ (٥) كَلَّا إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لِرَبِّهِ لَكَنَافٍ (٦) أُنْزِلَتْ
 رَأَاهُ اسْتَعْنَى (٧) إِنَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ الرُّجْعَىٰ (٨) أَرَأَيْتَ الَّذِي يَنْهَىٰ (٩) عَبْدًا إِذَا صَلَّىٰ (١٠)
 أَرَأَيْتَ إِنْ كَانَ عَلَىٰ الْهُدَىٰ (١١) أَوْ أَمَرَ بِالتَّقْوَىٰ (١٢) أَرَأَيْتَ إِنْ كَذَّبَ وَتَوَلَّىٰ (١٣) أَلَمْ
 يَعْلَمْ بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ يَرَىٰ (١٤) كَلَّا لَئِنْ لَمْ يَنْتَهِ لَنَسْفَعَنَّا بِالْأَصَابِ (١٥) نَاصِيَةً كَازِبَةٍ خَاطِئَةٍ (١٦)
 فَلْيَدْعُ نَادِيَهُ (١٧) سَنَدْعُ الزَّبَانِيَةَ (١٨) كَلَّا لَا تَطِعُهُ وَاسْجُدْ وَاقْتَرِبْ (١٩)

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Ever Merciful.

Read in the name of your Lord Who created – created man from a clot of congealed blood. Read and your Lord is the most Bounteous Who taught by the pen. He taught man what he knew not. (1-5)

Certainly not! Indeed, man is being rebellious considering himself to be self-sufficient. Indeed, to His Lord is the return. (7-8)

Just look at him who forbids a servant when he prays. Just consider if this person is rightly guided or urges others to virtue ... ! Just see if this person denied and turned away ... ! Does he not know that Allah is observing? (9-14)

Certainly not! If he does not desist, We shall drag him by the forelock, a lying, sinful forelock. Then let him call his faction. We shall summon Our guards. (15-18)

Certainly not! Do not obey him and bow down in prostration and draw near. (19)

Explanation

اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ^(١)

The word اِقْرَأْ (read) is not merely used to convey what a teacher would say to a student in order to ask him to read. It is also used to ask others to read the way it is in اِقْرَأْ عَلَى النَّاسِ (read it out to people and اَتْلُ عَلَى النَّاسِ (recite it out to people). This usage is found at many places in the Qur'ān. For example, while addressing the disbelievers who would cause a hindrance at the Qur'ān being read out to them, it is said:

وَإِذَا قُرِئَ الْقُرْآنُ فَاسْتَمِعُوا لَهُ وَأَنْصِتُوا لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ (٢٠٤:٧)

And when the Qur'ān is recited out, listen to it in silence so that you may be shown mercy. (7:204)

At another place, the words are:

وَإِذَا قَرَأْتَ الْقُرْآنَ جَعَلْنَا بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَ الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْآخِرَةِ حِجَابًا مَّسْتُورًا (٤٥:١٧)

And when you recite out the Qur'ān, We place between you and those who deny the life to come a hidden barrier. (17:45)

The indication to this usage is present within the verses.

The expression اِقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ directs the Prophet (sws) to read out the Qur'ān in the name of his Lord Who is the creator of all the world. This is a very important warning. The Prophet (sws) should present this Qur'ān as a directive from God which must necessarily be followed so that they know that what is being recited out to them is directly from God. These are not the words of some preacher nor of any other person. It is also not a request which can be turned down. It is in fact the word of the God Who has the right to give orders to His creation and it is the obligation of the people to obey it without the slightest of hesitation. They should not dare evade it or make fun of it or oppose it while considering it to be something trivial.

It should be kept in consideration that the Qur'ān is the word of God. No other Book before it has the honour to be entirely composed of the words revealed by God. For this reason, the Prophet (sws) has been directed to present it in the name of His Lord so that people are able to gauge its real exaltedness and they should not let themselves become a target of God's wrath by opposing it. It has been mentioned in the predictions recorded in previous divine scriptures about the advent of Muḥammad (sws) that

1. Read in the name of your Lord Who created.

whatever he will say, he will say in the name of God and the Almighty will take revenge from those people who will reject what is said to them in His name.² It is as if these words not only convey the exaltedness of the Qur'ān, they also warn the Quraysh that if they want to oppose it they must deeply contemplate the fate of this attitude of theirs.

خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ (٢)³

This is an expression of the specific after the general. The first verse mentions the creation of all the world and this verse emphatically mentions the creation of man.

The word عَلَق means a clot of congealed blood. At many places in the Qur'ān, a reminder is sounded about the early stages of a child's development in the womb. Thus among others, Sūrahs Ḥajj, Mu'minūn, Sajdah, Qiyāmah and Dahr mention these stages. At all these places, we have already explained the important words of the respective verses and also the special aspect which is intended through this reminder. In general, attention is meant to be focused on three issues:

Firstly, if the extent of power and wisdom of God is such that it fashions out a living being having such faculties as sight, hearing and intellect, how can it be difficult for Him to re-create such a living being?

Secondly, the powers and wisdom of God which are evident in man shows that he has not been created without a purpose: there shall come a day of accountability wherein he shall be rewarded or punished for his deeds.

Thirdly, it is not befitting for man who has been created from such a trivial and inconsequential stuff to show conceit and pride by indulging in self-glorification and self-veneration.

At some places in the Qur'ān, man is reminded of all these three issues and at some places just one or two of them are meant to be reminded of. It is evident from the context and nature of the discourse that here the first two issues are meant to be reminded of. The objective is that the Prophet (sws) should present the Book of God specifically in His name and should remind them that the God Who has created man from a clot

2. Reference is to the following words of the Old Testament:

I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put My words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. If anyone does not listen to My words that the prophet speaks in My name, I myself will call him to account. (Deuteronomy, 18:18)

3. Created man from a clot of congealed blood.

of congealed blood is fully capable of re-creating him and then calling him to account.

اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ (۳) الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ (۴)

The word اقْرَأْ mentioned in this verse is a permutative (بدل) of the one mentioned in the first and emphasizes the directive mentioned there. However, in this verse there also exists an expression of divine favour: the Quraysh should value the great blessing of the Almighty whereby He guided them through the pen. One should know that before the revelation of the Qur'ān, whatever teachings of the Prophets Abraham (sws) and Ishmael survived with the Ishmaelites were in the form of oral traditions. With the passage of time alterations had crept in them. As far as the teachings of other prophets of God are concerned, they too were given in oral form. Though Moses (sws) was given the Ten Commandments in written form, however the Torah we have today is only a written record of tradition: it is impossible to distinguish what section of it is in the words of God and what is in the words of unknown narrators. However, for the Qur'ān the Almighty made elaborate arrangements that all of it be composed of His words; moreover, it was not left to mere oral tradition: it was preserved in writing in the very words of God. As has already been explained in the *tafsīr* of Sūrah Qalam and Sūrah Qiyāmah, this task was accomplished under the scrutiny of God Almighty so that everything is preserved word for word.

This particular aspect of preservation is mentioned by the words عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ. There is no doubt that this was a great favour for the Arabs. In the first place, as indicated earlier, this form of preservation of divine revelation had not been adopted previously and secondly, since the Arabs were unlettered they were not fully aware of the use of the pen but because of the Qur'ān they preserved through it this treasure of divine revelation which was not merely an asset for them: it was meant for all mankind.

عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ (۵)

Mentioned in this verse is another aspect of the divine favour alluded to in the previous verse: the unlettered Arabs were not only bestowed with divine guidance in written form, they were further blessed with teachings they were not aware of. Though a general word الْإِنْسَانَ (man) is used in this verse; however, since the first addressees of the Qur'ān were

4. Read and your Lord is the most Bounteous Who taught by the pen.

5. He taught man what he knew not.

the unlettered Arabs, therefore, this word is primarily spoken for them. It was the special favour of the Almighty that He led them out of the darkness of ignorance by revealing to them this complete guidance. It is now their obligation to value and honour it. In Sūrah Jumu'ah, this aspect is discussed in the following words:

هُوَ الَّذِي بَعَثَ فِي الْأُمِّيِّينَ رَسُولًا مِّنْهُمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ
وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَإِنْ كَانُوا مِن قَبْلُ لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ (٢:٦٢)

It is He that has sent forth among the unlettered a prophet from among themselves. He recites to them His revelations and purifies them, and instructs them in the Book and in wisdom, though before this they had been in manifest error. (62:2)

With slight difference in style, this aspect is also discussed in verses 151 and 198 of Sūrah Baqarah and verse 164 of Sūrah 'Āli 'Imra#n and we have already fully explained it.

Just as this verse bestows a favour on the Quraysh, it also warns them: if they do not value and respect this greatest favour of God, they should then contemplate what fate they will meet for their ingratitude and arrogance.

كَلَّا إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لِرَبِّهِ لَكَنَّاظٍ (٦) أَنْ رَّأَهُ اسْتَعْتَصَى (٧)^٦

This verse depicts the behaviour of the Arabs which they adopted with this guidance of God: instead of duly honouring it, they are rejecting it out of sheer arrogance; the reason for this is that their wealth and resources have made them indifferent to God.

This verse begins with the emphatic negative particle كَلَّا (certainly not). It is meant to negate the excuses the Quraysh would make in rejecting the Qur'ān and the Prophet (sws). These excuses fabricated by them are meant to cover up the reality. The real reason of their rejection was considering themselves self-sufficient from God and their love for this world. However, they would pretend as if they had certain objections for which they were not receiving satisfactory answers.

إِنَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ الرُّجْعَىٰ (٨)^٧

The word رُجْعَى is a verbal noun similar to بُشْرَى and means "to return".

6. Certainly not! Indeed man is being rebellious considering himself to be self-sufficient.

7. Indeed, to His Lord is the return.

The implication is that the Prophet (sws) should let them do what they are doing. Finally, they will have to return to their Lord to whom they have become indifferent and fearless. At that time, they will come to know the fate of their arrogance. If they think that their alleged deities will be their saviours and Lords, then they will come to know how baseless their view is. On that Day, only God will reign supreme and no one else will be able to save a person from His grasp.

أَرَأَيْتَ الَّذِي يَنْهَى (٩) عَبْدًا إِذَا صَلَّى (١٠)^٨

Mentioned in this verse is an example of their rebellious attitude referred to earlier. The heard-hearts among the Quraysh are alluded to here who would stop the Prophet (sws) and other Muslims from praying. The foremost obligation of a person towards his Lord is serving and worshipping Him and the foremost manifestation of worship is the prayer. Thus a person in praying is discharging his foremost obligation towards his Lord and is worthy of being shown respect for this deed. He should be regarded as someone worth following in this matter. If someone is audacious enough to stop him in this regard, then this would mean that he is stopping someone from discharging his foremost obligation towards God.

We have explained at various places in this *tafsīr* that the style أَرَأَيْتَ is used to direct the attention of people to something very inappropriate or to criticize someone. Expressions such as “just look at him”, “have you seen him” and “take a look at what he is doing” are its equivalents in the English language.

It is not necessary that a specific person be considered to be implied by the word الَّذِي. It can be used to portray people who indulge in such unworthy activity. We have already explained this style in this *tafsīr*. It was not Abū Jahl only who would stop the Prophet (sws) from praying; there were other ruffians besides him too who would do so and these ruffians would not stop the Prophet (sws) only from praying; they would stop other servants of God also from praying.

أَرَأَيْتَ إِنْ كَانَ عَلَى الْهُدَى (١١) أَوْ أَمَرَ بِالتَّقْوَى (١٢)^٩

The implication is that before taking this foolish step, the person should have thought that in his frenzy against Islam, he should not have become so overcome as to not even contemplate the fate that he will meet. Is not there a chance that this servant of God is on the right path and with his

8. Just see him who forbids a servant when he prays.

9. Just consider if this person is rightly guided or urges [others] to virtue ... !

words and deeds calls others to piety and virtue? Will disregarding this possibility, this person would then be merely inviting the wrath of God. In other words, on what basis does he regard this frenzied step of his to be correct – a step which can only be taken by Satan.

أَرَأَيْتَ إِنْ كَذَّبَ وَتَوَلَّى¹⁰ (١٣)

This is a reference to the second possibility we have referred to above: what if this person was the one who denied and who turned away, then ...! The implication is that in this case it would be he who would be responsible for opening the door to Hell. Here, an ellipsis of the overall apodosis has occurred to point to the fact that its severity is beyond words – a common style of classical Arabic. An example of such an ellipsis can also be seen in Sūrah Yūnus.

The fate of the people who reject the Prophet (sws) and turn away from his call is mentioned thus in Sūrah Layl:

لَا يَصْلَاهَا إِلَّا الْأَشْقَى الَّذِي كَذَّبَ وَتَوَلَّى (٩٢: ١٥-١٦)

Only those wretched creatures shall enter Hell who denied and turned away. (92:15-16)

أَلَمْ يَعْلَم بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ يَرَى¹¹ (١٤)

The implication of this verse is that does such a person not realize that the Almighty is watching all his unrestrained behaviour. Now if He is and surely He is, then He will definitely take its revenge. He is just, merciful, powerful and has a great sense of honour. If His servants are stopped from worshipping Him, how can he tolerate this as a bystander.

كَلَّا لَئِنْ لَمْ يَنْتَهِ لَنَسْفَعَنَّ بِالنَّاصِيَةِ¹² (١٥)

This verse sounds a severe warning to such arrogant people. The word *نَاصِيَةٍ* refers to the forehead and the hair scattered over it. The word *سَفَعٌ* means to drag something by grabbing it in the fist. In Sūrah Raḥmān, the fate of such people is mentioned thus: *فَيُؤْخَذُ بِالنَّوَاصِي وَ الْأَقْدَامِ* (٥٥: ٤١) (Then they shall be grasped by their forelocks and legs and thrown in Hell. (55:41).

10. Just see if this person denied and turned away ... !

11. Does he not know that Allah is observing [him]?

12. Certainly not! If he does not desist, We shall drag him by the forelock.

نَاصِيَةٍ كَاذِبَةٍ خَاطِئَةٍ (١٦)¹³

The word نَاصِيَةٍ is a permutative (بدل) of the النَّاصِيَةِ of the previous verse. Though the former is not defined by the article *alif lām* and the latter is, yet such a grammatical interpretation is possible because the نَاصِيَةِ of this verse is defined by an adjective and such a noun can technically be regarded as a permutative (بدل) of a noun defined by the article *alif lām*.

The anger and rage which seems to be exuding from every word of this verse is worth noting. The forelocks of such ruffians are mentioned in very harsh words. The face and forehead is the most honourable part of body and for this reason, at times, signifies the whole personality of a person as is the case here. Also the greatest honour for a forehead is the mark of prostration that becomes stamped on it. If a person is so callous that not only he himself does not prostrate before God, but also stops others from prostrating before Him, then such a wretched person is worthy of being grabbed by the forelock and thrown in Hell.

فَلْيَدْعُ نَادِيَهُ (١٧) سَنَدْعُ الزَّبَانِيَةَ (١٨)¹⁴

This is a challenge thrown to these arrogant people. If they are bigheaded about their power, then they should call all their allies and the Almighty will call His guards and see how much power they have. The first practical test of this challenge in the later period was in the battlefield of Badr and the world witnessed that the whole power and collectivity of the Quraysh was humiliated at the hands of the Almighty's guards.

The real meaning of the word نَادِي is "a gathering", "a society". Here, in this verse, it refers to individuals who are associated together in some communal relationship. Keeping in view the context, it can be translated as "group" and "party".

The word زَبَانِيَّة is the plural of زَبْنِيَّة and its real meaning is "defender"; however, it is also used for policemen and law enforcing personnel. It has been translated as "guards" keeping in view the context. In other words, this is a divine task force of angels which is sent for special missions which are temporary in nature.

كَلَّا لَا تُطِيعُوهُ وَاسْجُدْ وَاقْتَرِبْ (١٩)¹⁵

These words sound assurance to the Prophet (sws): if someone is

13. A lying, sinful forelock.

14. Then let him call his faction. We shall summon Our guards.

15. Certainly not! Do not obey him and bow down in prostration and draw near.

stopping him from prostrating before God, just ignore him and draw nearer the Almighty by prostrating before Him. It should be kept in mind that at many places the Qur’ān has regarded the prayer as the key to perseverance and resolve and to earning His help. The most grand component of the prayer is prostration. This is an allusion to the fact that who would dare stop the Prophet (sws) from something which is the objective of his life and the sole means of his relationship with God. If any one does dare to do such a thing, he should seek refuge with the Almighty. The only way to do this is to prostrate before Him.

Period of Revelation of the Sūrah

This brings us to the end of the explanation of this *sūrah*. Let us now deliberate on its period of revelation by analyzing its contents. The most helpful thing in determining the period of revelation of a *sūrah* is to deliberate on its tone, address and style of address. For this very reason, I have raised this question at the end of the explanation instead of discussing it in the introductory part of the *sūrah*. Readers can form an opinion for themselves on this issue about which our exegetes have different opinions.

The most famous opinion on the period of revelation of this *sūrah* is that it is the first revealed *sūrah* of the Qur’ān. Some people regard the whole *sūrah* as the first revelation of the Qur’ān, but the majority regards its first five verses to be the first revelation of the Qur’ān. This latter opinion is based on a narrative in *Bukhārī* and *Muslim*.

The second opinion is that of Zamakhsharī. He has recorded in his *tafsīr*: (وأكثر المفسرين على أن الفاتحة أول ما نزل ثم سورة القلم) (And most exegetes are of the view that Sūrah Fātiḥah was revealed the foremost and then Sūrah Qalam).¹⁶ Some exegetes have differed with this opinion and some have accepted it.

A third opinion on this issue is that Sūrah Muddaththir was revealed the foremost. The proponents of this view most probably regard its initial verses only as the first revelation because the tone of the rest of the *sūrah* and its style of address is so stern and severe like Sūrah ‘Alaq that it is very difficult to regard the whole *sūrah* as the first revelation.

In my opinion, Sūrah ‘Alaq is a harmonious whole and a single well-knit unit. The tone of its first five verses is no different from that of the rest of the *sūrah*. Such is the severity in its style of address that one fails to understand that why should such a *sūrah* be regarded as the first revelation. Moreover, there is no indication within the *sūrah* to regard it

16. Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf*, vol. 4 ((Beirut Dār iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, n.d.), 784.

to have been revealed in two episodes. God knows best. This is my opinion and gratitude be to Him.

Lahore,

4th March, 1980 AD

16th Rabī al-Thānī, 1400 AH

Sūrah Qadr

Central Theme

In the preceding *sūrah*, it is pointed out that the revelation of the Qur'ān was a great blessing and favour of the Almighty.¹ The fact that it was safeguarded in written form to provide mankind with Divine Guidance is also referred to. Now, this *sūrah* deals with the topic of the revelation of the Qur'ān itself. A special reference is made to the night in which the Qur'ān was revealed together with a mention of its greatness and importance in relation to other nights. Although these matters pertain to the unknown, and a complete understanding of their nature is not possible, yet any disclosed portion is always beneficial to the seekers of truth.

The purpose of this delineation is to inform the people addressed that whatever attitude they adopt about this Book, they must first seriously contemplate on a few realities:

Firstly, this Book is not the result of some human whim; it is part of a Divine Scheme, and has been revealed under the direct surveillance of the Almighty Himself.

Secondly, this event is not temporary or transient in nature. Everyone should be aware that it has taken place in a night in which important decisions are made and executed. This night is superior to a thousand nights. Matters of paramount importance are settled and decided during it. Those who deprive themselves of its blessings cannot gain them in any other way.

Thirdly, the Book is totally free from any sort of evil interference from Satan as the night in which it was revealed has been specially protected from his intrusions and interventions.

1. Recite [O Prophet!] Your Lord is the most Bounteous. He, who by the pen taught man what he did not know. [96:3-5]

Text and Translation

سورة القدر

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ فِي لَيْلَةِ الْقَدْرِ (١) وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا لَيْلَةُ الْقَدْرِ (٢) لَيْلَةُ الْقَدْرِ خَيْرٌ مِنْ أَلْفِ شَهْرٍ (٣) تَنَزَّلُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ وَالرُّوحُ فِيهَا بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِمْ مِنْ كُلِّ أَمْرٍ (٤) سَلَامٌ هِيَ حَتَّى مَطْلَعِ الْفَجْرِ (٥)

Indeed, We sent it down in the Night of Destiny. And what do you imagine what the Night of Destiny is? Better is the Night of Destiny than a thousand months. The angels and the Spirit descend therein about all matters, by the permission of their Lord.

It is peace in its entirety. It remains until the appearance of dawn.

Explanation

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ فِي لَيْلَةِ الْقَدْرِ (١)²

In the previous *sūrah*, God's great blessing of providing guidance to His creation by revealing the Qur'ān is mentioned. Now in this *sūrah* without any prior introduction, it is stated that the Almighty had revealed it in the Night of Destiny. Though at first it seems that the accusative pronoun in the word أَنْزَلْنَاهُ does not have an antecedent, the placement of this *sūrah* after the previous one clearly indicates the antecedent. In fact, a little deliberation shows that this strongly supports the argument that every preceding *sūrah* has a deep coherent relationship, intrinsic as well as extrinsic, with the succeeding one.

The stress in the word إِنَّا (Indeed We) has a very special purpose. It is meant to dispel the doubt that the Qur'ān is the result of a human endeavour. It emphasizes that the Qur'ān is totally free from the evil inspiration and influences of Satan, as its opponents had contended. On the contrary, It has been solely revealed by the Almighty Himself to provide guidance and direction to mankind. لَيْلَةُ الْقَدْرِ means the night in which matters are decided and their enforcement entrusted to the angles. It is the same night referred to in the following verses of Sūrah Dukhān:

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ فِي لَيْلَةٍ مُبَارَكَةٍ إِنَّا كُنَّا مُنْذِرِينَ فِيهَا يُفْرَقُ كُلُّ أَمْرٍ حَكِيمٍ إِنَّا كُنَّا مُرْسِلِينَ (٤٤: ٣-٥)

We have revealed this (Qur'ān) in a blessed night. Verily, by its

2. Indeed, We sent it down in the Night of Destiny.

means, We are going to warn mankind. During this night all decrees of wisdom are assigned [to the angels], by Our special command. Indeed, We were to send a Prophet. (44:3-5)

If we reflect upon these verses, two of their implications become very clear:

Firstly, the Almighty has fixed a glorious night to specially hand over His decrees to the angels which are to be enforced by them in this world.

Secondly, the commissioning of the Prophet Muhammad (sws), his indhar³ to the Quraysh and the revelation of the Qur'ān are among the Divine Decrees entrusted to the angels during this night, which is a clear proof of the extraordinary significance of these events. They are a part of an important plan devised by the Almighty which must reach completion.

The verse does not mean that the whole of the Qur'ān was revealed in a single night. All that it necessitates is that after a decision was made and the matter handed over to Gabriel, its first revelation took place during the night. Subsequently, the Qur'ān was revealed in sections over a period of twenty three years, which in no way contradicts the actual meaning of the verse.

وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا لَيْلَةُ الْقَدْرِ (٤)⁴

The verse tells us that the greatness and splendour of the Night of Destiny is beyond the realms of imagination. The reason behind its majesty and grandeur is that important decisions about this world are made in it. When the days on which the petty administrations of this world chalk out their countries' future year projects have great importance, then how can the significance of the Night in which Divine Directives are issued forth to decide the fate of the whole universe be estimated.

These decisions are both positive and negative in their nature: At one place destruction might take place while at another something might be created. At some other place the pangs of punishment might be at work, while an adjacent place might witness God's blessings. But since these diverse manifestations emanate from the Almighty Whose justice, wisdom and mercy are beyond question and Whose schemes are based upon the collective good of man, all decisions are beneficial to man in their overall capacity and augur well for the future. This is precisely the reason why this night has been termed as the Night of Blessing in Sūrah

3. To warn people of their fate in this as well as the next world.

4. And what do you imagine what the Night of Destiny is?

Dukhān as quoted earlier, and why it has been called better than a thousand months. These attributes and characteristics of the night, as have been pointed out before, indicate to the adversaries of the Qur'ān that they are thoroughly mistaken if they consider a Book revealed in an exalted night to be a product of fantasy or sorcery. They have failed to distinguish a nugget from a pebble. There is no possibility that an evil inspiration can penetrate during this majestic night, as in this night the priceless pearls of revelation are showered by the Creator of the Heavens.

لَيْلَةُ الْقَدْرِ خَيْرٌ مِنْ أَلْفِ شَهْرٍ (٣)⁵

This is an expression of the exaltedness of the Night. The relative state of being “better” is because it is favourable for the achievement of certain objectives. Just as in this material world there is a certain climate in a certain part of the year in which the seeds of a particular crop must be sown if they are to sprout, and any negligence to these factors will not yield the required produce even in some other prolonged periods of time; likewise, in the spiritual world also there are special days and times of the year which are set aside for special acts of worship. If they are offered during them, only then the required results are obtained, and any ignorance in this regard cannot be compensated in other periods of time even if their span is extended. A few examples will make this matter more clear. To offer the Friday prayers, a certain day has been set aside; similarly, a particular month has been fixed for fasting; for the offering of *hajj* and its rites too, certain days have been appointed by the Almighty. All these acts of worship have been made conditional to certain periods of time, during which their offering yields a reward that cannot be estimated.

The Night of Destiny also is no exception to this rule. A person who prostrates himself before the Almighty during this night might attain His nearness to an extent which he may never be able to emulate in a thousand other nights. The words “thousand nights” can be an expression of abundance as well as that of a relative significance over other nights, but there is no big difference between the meanings both imply. The purpose is to point out that a lot of spiritual wealth is hidden beneath the veils of this night. Lucky are the ones who strive and reap its bounties.

It is a universally acknowledged fact about this night that the revelation of the Qur'ān began during it, and that this night occurred during the month of Ramaḍān, as mentioned in the following verses of

5. Better is the Night of Destiny than a thousand months.

Sūrah Baqarah: (١٨٥:٢) شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ الَّذِي أُنْزِلَ فِيهِ الْقُرْآنُ (It is the month of Ramadān during which the Qur'ān was revealed, (2:185)). As far as the question about the exact date is concerned, it is difficult to answer it due to some disparities found in the Aḥādīth that deal with this subject. The only thing which can be said is that it occurred most probably during the last ten days of the month.

Due to the discrepancies in the Aḥādīth which relate to this matter some people have raised the question whether the night can occur in months other than Ramadān. Another question raised is that whether this night comes in every Ramadān, or does it have a different span. A satisfactory answer to these queries can only be given if the concerned Aḥādīth are critically analysed and examined, which is beyond the scope of this exegesis. I have indicated these difficulties so that our learned scholars can deliberate over them. If the Almighty provides this writer with an opportunity to write his proposed treatise upon Ḥādīth, these questions may be tackled therein.

تَنْزِيلُ الْمَلَائِكَةِ وَالرُّوحُ فِيهَا بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِمْ مِنْ كُلِّ أَمْرٍ^٦

It has been mentioned before that during this night matters are decided and assigned to the angels for their enforcement. This verse is an explanation of this fact. In this night, Archangel Gabriel and other angels descend upon the earth to carry out the tasks allocated to them by the Almighty, as is also mentioned in the following verses: فِيهَا يُفْرَقُ كُلُّ أَمْرٍ^٥ حَكِيمٍ أَمْرًا مِّنْ عِنْدِنَا (٤٤: ٥-٤) (during this Night all decrees of wisdom are assigned [to the angels] by Our special commandment, (44:4-5)).

The word الرُّوح (the Spirit), as is evident from the context is used for Gabriel. His name is specially mentioned here because he occupies a very high rank among the angels.

سَلَامٌ هِيَ حَتَّىٰ مَطْلَعِ الْفَجْرِ^٧

This verse explains why the Night of Destiny is superior to a thousand months.

In the opinion of this writer, سَلَامٌ is the enunciative (*khabr*) of a suppressed inchoative (*mubtadā*). The complete sentence can be unfolded thus: هِيَ سَلَامٌ (It is peace in its entirety). An Inchoative is usually suppressed to emphasize the enunciative. Just as in the sentence

6. The angels and the Spirit descend therein about all matters, by the permission of their Lord.

7. It is peace in its entirety. It remains until the appearance of dawn.

عَدْلٌ (Zayd is justice) an exaggeration is implied by the word عَدْلٌ (justice), likewise, the word سَلَامٌ (peace in entirety) also has a strong element of hyperbole in it.

The word سَلَامٌ signifies safety and protection from every sort of risk and danger in general and from any satanic interference in particular. Just as during the time of revelation, all passages into the world beyond space and time are sealed to block the penetrations of Satan and his army, as is mentioned at various places in the Qur'ān, it looks as if during this night also these evil creatures are under Divine detention till the rise of dawn. Hence, they are unable to acquire the secrets of this night and are unable to cause disruptions in the blessings of this night.

Sūrah Bayyinah

Central Theme and Relationship with Previous Sūrah

This *sūrah* is the counterpart of Sūrah Qadr, the previous *sūrah*. The exaltedness of the Qur'ān is mentioned in it and it is explained that the reason because of which the People of the Book and the Idolaters of Makkah had formed an alliance at that time to reject the Qur'ān was not because they had any real doubt about it; but the fact of the matter was that it was their conceit and arrogance which led them to this attitude. Outwardly they would show that if some open sign is shown to them about the veracity of the Qur'ān, they would profess belief in it; however, this was just a deception on their part for even the greatest of signs and miracles would not convince them in this matter. Even if they witness such a sign, they would make up some excuse to cover up their haughtiness. If the People of the Book who were at that time supporting the Idolaters and implanting objections in their heart to deny the Qur'ān take a look at their character in the light of their own history, it will become evident to them that the type of miracles they are demanding today were also demanded earlier by their predecessors from their respective prophets. They were even shown these miracles and in spite of this they wreaked havoc with the religion of God and His Book. The real thing which is needed to profess faith is a feeling of fear for the Almighty. Those who have this fear will believe in this Book. As far as people whose hearts have hardened are concerned, they will not believe in it however great a sign be shown to them.

Period of Revelation

Some exegetes regard this *sūrah* to be revealed in Madīnah. To me, this opinion is not correct. Perhaps the reason for holding this view is that besides the Idolaters, this *sūrah* also mentions the behaviour of the People of the Book. However, merely such a reference is not enough to regard a *sūrah* to be Madīnan. If readers have had a chance to read through the previous groups of the Qur'ān, they would have observed that in every group, the last Makkan *sūrahs* allude to the behaviour of the People of the Book besides that of the Idolaters and this expression gradually becomes more and more pronounced. The reason for this is that in Makkah the matter of a new prophet and a new message was not such that the People of the Book, specially the Jews could remain indifferent to it. Their scholars already feared the advent of a new prophet because of the

predictions found in their scriptures. So, how could they disregard this new call. However, in the beginning, they did not take any practical part in opposing this call because observing the intense enmity of the Quraysh they thought that they would be enough to end this new faith. So when they saw that this message was spreading in spite of the opposition of the Quraysh, they started to support them. Initially, the method they adopted for this was to implant and suggest objections and questions to the Quraysh which they were told to ask the Prophet (sws) in order to pester and harass him. Then because of their claim to religious superiority, they devised certain self-made criteria for a prophet and asked the Quraysh to judge this new prophet on the basis of these criteria. For example, they told the Quraysh that they have been directed in their scriptures to not corroborate any prophethood unless a fire descends from the sky and consumes an animal sacrifice offered by the new prophet. The Qur'ān has referred to these pranks of theirs at a number of places. The Jews had taken to this mischief in the very beginning and hence we find its reference at various places in the Makkan *sūrahs*. In this *sūrah* too, their alliance with the Quraysh is referred to for this purpose.

Analysis of the Discourse

The sequence of this *sūrah*'s discourse is as follows:

(Verses 1-3): First, an assurance is sounded to the Prophet (sws) that he should not think that the mischief-mongers among the Quraysh and the People of the Book who are opposing him would desist from their ways at any cost and accept the Qur'ān. They will only believe when an angel will descend from the skies whilst reading some scripture and they are able to observe him in this state.

(Verses 4-5): After this, the attitude of the People of the Book is criticized: these disgraceful people are lending support to the Quraysh out of their enmity for the Prophet (sws). Such is the extent of their misfortune that they witnessed great miracles but still they could not embrace the religion of God. In fact, they remained blind even after seeing these miracles and could not remain united on the foundations of religion in which there is no room for any difference of opinion.

(Verses 6-8): In the end, both the Quraysh and the People of the Book are sternly reprimanded on their pride and vanity: they consider themselves to be very superior and for this reason are not willing to even entertain the new call; the fact of the matter is that they are the worst of God's creatures; they shall be thrown into Hell. Only those people are of any status before God who profess faith in Him without seeing Him and do righteous deeds and not the conceited who would only believe once they have seen everything from their very eyes.

Text and Translation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

لَمْ يَكُنْ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ وَالْمُشْرِكِينَ مُنْفَكِّينَ حَتَّى تَأْتِيَهُمُ الْبَيِّنَةُ (١)
رَسُولٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ يَتْلُو صُحُفًا مُطَهَّرَةً (٢) فِيهَا كُتِبَ قَيِّمَةٌ (٣) وَ مَا تَفَرَّقَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا
الْكِتَابَ إِلَّا مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَتْهُمْ الْبَيِّنَةُ (٤) وَمَا أُمِرُوا إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ
خُنَفَاءَ وَيُقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَذَلِكَ دِينُ الْقَيِّمَةِ (٥) إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ أَهْلِ
الْكِتَابِ وَالْمُشْرِكِينَ فِي نَارِ جَهَنَّمَ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا أُولَئِكَ هُمْ شَرُّ الْبَرِيَّةِ (٦) إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا
وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ أُولَئِكَ هُمْ خَيْرُ الْبَرِيَّةِ (٧) جَزَاؤُهُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ جَنَّاتٌ عَدْنٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ
تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا أَبَدًا رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ وَرَضُوا عَنْهُ ذَلِكَ لِمَنْ خَشِيَ رَبَّهُ (٨)

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Ever Merciful.

Those among the People of the Book and the Idolaters who have denied [the Qur'ān] shall not give up their stubbornness until there comes to them a clear sign – a messenger from Allah reciting purified pages in which are written clear directives. (1-3)

The fact of the matter is that the People of the Book differed only after such a clear sign had come to them. They had been directed to worship God alone, obeying Him exclusively with sincere devotion and to show diligence in the prayer and to pay *zakāh* and this is the religion of the Upright Nation. (4-5)

Indeed, those among the People of the Book and the Idolaters who disbelieved shall be cast into the fire of Hell to dwell there forever. These very people are the worst of creatures. (6)

Indeed, those who embraced faith and did righteous deeds, they, indeed, are the best of creatures. Their reward with Allah is the gardens of eternity beneath which rivers flow. They will dwell there forever. God is pleased with them and they with Him. This is the reward of him who feared his Lord. (7-8)

Explanation

لَمْ يَكُنْ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ وَالْمُشْرِكِينَ مُنْفَكِّينَ حَتَّى تَأْتِيَهُمُ الْبَيِّنَةُ (١)¹

Here the expression لَمْ يَكُنْ does not convey the sense of an incomplete verb (فعل ناقص). It conveys the sense of a complete verb the

1. Those among the People of the Book and the Idolaters who have denied [the Qur'ān] shall not give up their stubbornness until there comes to them a clear sign.

way its inflection does in the verse (وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمًا (٤: ١٧) (God is all-knowing and wise, (4:17)). The translation of the verse had been done keeping in consideration this aspect.

The object of the verb كَفَرُوا is suppressed here because of textual indications. The suppressed object is the Qur'ān and the Messenger which they denied.

The People of the Book and the Idolaters are mentioned here in the capacity of two groups who spearheaded the opposition shown to the Prophet (sww) in those times. The Idolaters showed open opposition while the People of the Book, as we have indicated in the introduction to the *sūrah*, were covert in this regard. When the word *mushrikūn* (Idolaters) is mentioned in the Qur'ān the way it is here, it stands as a proper noun for the Idolaters of the Quraysh or the Idolaters of the Ishmaelites. The Qur'ān is replete with such usage.

The particle مِنْ here is in its commonly known meaning of connoting the sub-set of a whole (تبعيض) because in this verse the character of those groups among the Idolaters and the People of the Book is discussed who were blindly opposing Islam. In both these religious denominations, all people were not alike; they also contained some solemn people who embraced Islam and those who among them who did not embrace Islam either adopted a balanced attitude towards the new faith or remained impartial. The Qur'ān has lauded such people. Thus the particle مِنْ is used here to signify this very divide among them: only those among the People of the Book are referred to here who were not willing to listen to anything unless they were shown the miracles they were demanding.

The expression حَتَّى تَأْتِيَهُمُ الْبَيِّنَةُ (until there comes to them a clear sign) mentions the condition of these stubborn people without whose fulfillment they were not ready to give up their obduracy. بَيِّنَةٌ means “a manifest sign”. By such a manifest sign they meant that such a miracle be shown to them which they would not be able to deny. The Qur'ān has mentioned this demand of theirs at many places. Here are a few examples which would illustrate their mentality in this regard.

In Sūrah Nisā', this demand of the People of the Book is mentioned in the following words:

يَسْأَلُكَ أَهْلُ الْكِتَابِ أَنْ تُنَزِّلَ عَلَيْهِمْ كِتَابًا مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ فَقَدْ سَأَلُوا مُوسَىٰ أَكْبَرَ مِنْ
ذَلِكَ فَقَالُوا أَرَنَا اللَّهَ جَهْرَةً (١٥٣: ٤)

The People of the Book ask you to bring down directly for them a book from the heavens; [only then will they believe; their demand is not strange at all]; of Moses they demanded an even bigger thing. They

said to him: “Show us God manifestly [then shall we believe].” (4:153)

Similarly, with regard to the *mushrikūn*, it is stated in Sūrah Muddaththir:

بَلْ يُرِيدُ كُلُّ امْرِئٍ مِنْهُمْ أَنْ يُؤْتَى صُحُفًا مُنَشَّرَةً (٧٤: ٥٢)

In fact, each one among them wants that he be handed over open pages. (74:52)

In other words, these people are not willing to believe in the Qur’ān which has been sent down to just one person through divine revelation: their demand is that for each of them a separate scripture be revealed. Only then will they believe that the Almighty has in fact revealed a book for their guidance.

رَسُولٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ يَتْلُو صُحُفًا مُطَهَّرَةً (٢) فِيهَا كُتِبَ قَيِّمَةٌ (٣)²

This is an explanation of *al-bayyinah* (the sign) referred to in the previous verse: their demand is that if it is desired that they profess faith, then an angel should directly descend from the Almighty while reading purified pages in which explicit and definite directives are written.

It is evident from the words رَسُولٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ that they did not want any messenger from among human beings claiming that he received divine revelations: they wanted some angel directly sent by the Almighty who would read untouched and pure pages.

The word صَحِيفَةٌ (singular of صُحُف) also connotes “a page”. The implication is that they will not believe the angel if he merely informs them of the messages of the Almighty; They will only believe him when whatever he brings in the name of God should be in fact written and read out to them. The adjective مُطَهَّرَةٌ of pages is meant to indicate that these pages should be pure and untouched. Except for God and the angels no one among men and jinn should have touched them.

Another condition is stated in the next verse: فِيهَا كُتِبَ قَيِّمَةٌ: the written pages should not contain tales and stories from here and there; they should have clear and unambiguous directives written in them so that they are able to readily know what their Lord has allowed and what He has prohibited. The word كُتِبَ is a plural of كَتَبَ. We have already explained its connotations and usages earlier.³ It was shown there that this word also

2. – A messenger from Allah reciting purified pages in which are written clear directives.

3. See: Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥī, *Tadabbur-i Qur’ān*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (Lahore: Faran Foundation, 1986), 86.

means directives of the *sharī'ah*. Here in this verse, it is used thus.

The word قَيِّمَةٌ means “straight, clear and explicit”. In other words, they desired explicit directives and did not want that un-related directives be read out to them. Connoisseurs of the language well understand the acerbic ridicule inherent in this word uttered by these mischievous people: their demand was that just as the ten commandments of the Torah had been written on stone tablets, similarly, clear directives written on sheets should be brought to them by the angel; only then will they accept the divinity of the Book of God.

وَمَا تَفَرَّقَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ إِلَّا مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَتْهُمْ الْبَيِّنَةُ (٤)⁴

Since the demand mentioned in the previous verse originated from the People of the Book which they implanted in the minds of the Quraysh so that the latter use it against the Qur'ān, the Qur'ān has responded to this demand while keeping them in consideration. It is said that even if these people are shown a miracle on their demand, they are not ones who would believe. Their own history shows that whatever *sharī'ah* they were given, was given in the company of some open miracles. Their Prophet Moses (sws) showed them every now and then such signs of their God which were never ever shown to any people: the ten commandments of the Torah were written on tablets, whilst taking the covenant of *sharī'ah* from them mount Sinai was raised above them and twelve fountains were generated for them from a mountain; however, even after witnessing all these signs and miracles the manner in which they fulfilled their covenant with the *sharī'ah* was that they started worshipping a calf fashioned out by Sāmarī. The first great dissension that arose among them originated from this ugly incident and it continued to increase with the passage of time. A time reached when the only thing common among them was difference.

وَمَا أُمِرُوا إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ حُنَفَاءَ وَيُقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَذَلِكَ دِينُ الْقَيِّمَةِ (٥)⁵

This is an example of the dissension mentioned in the previous verse: there was not a single fundamental tenet of religion to which they adhered. They had serious differences in every tenet of religion; so much

4. The fact of the matter is that the People of the Book differed only after such a clear sign had come to them.

5. They had been directed to worship God alone, obeying Him exclusively with sincere devotion and to show diligence in the prayer and to pay zakāh and this is the religion of the Upright Nation.

so, they lost many of these tenets just because of this attitude.

They had also been directed by the Almighty to adhere to monotheism exclusively obeying Him and fully devoting themselves to Him; however, they ruined this basic teaching of religion. Right in the presence of their prophet, they worshipped the calf, deemed 'Uzayr to be God's son and regarded their religious scholars to be partners of God. They were incriminated with sorcery and magic and went as far as to worship the idols of other nations on which their prophets lamented in a very sad and moving way.

Similarly, they were also directed to offer the prayer and pay *zakāh*. As is explained in the *tafsīr* of Sūrah Baqarah, they totally disregarded the prayer and such was the extent of this disregard that the Torah even became devoid of its mention. The Torah does mention the ritual of animal sacrifice; however, the prayer finds no mention in it. Similar was the case with *zakāh*. Though it did continue to exist in a formal way, yet instead of the poor and needy, the religious scholars of the Levites became its real recipients and if anyone wants to have an idea of the stinginess of these scholars, one only needs to read how the Gospels and scriptures of other prophets portray their greediness.

The words *وَذَلِكَ دِينُ الْقَيِّمَةِ* (and this is the religion of the upright nation) are actually an answer to their demand mentioned earlier by the words *فِيهَا كُتِبَ قَيِّمَةٌ* (in which are written explicit directives). The implication is that if these people really desired clear and explicit directives of religion, they had already been given them in the capacity of the upright and very natural directives of the religion of Abraham (sws). Why did they then show total disregard to them? Similarly, this Qur'ān is also informing them of clear and explicit directives; so why are they also getting after it? The whole implication is that all these questions raised by the People of the Book originate from their jealousy: they wanted others to be deprived of the *sharī'ah* of God, just as they had deprived themselves of it.

In the expression: *وَذَلِكَ دِينُ الْقَيِّمَةِ* an ellipsis of the noun of the adjective *الْقَيِّمَةِ* has occurred which is customary in classical Arabic in the presence of some indication to such an ellipsis. The implied expression is: *وَذَلِكَ دِينُ الْمِلَّةِ الْقَيِّمَةِ*. The objective of this style is to refer to the fact that these are the basic directives of religion which were transferred to both branches of the family of Abraham (sws) as the heritage of its grand progenitor: Abraham (sws). So what a pity if these very branches try to become accomplices in opposing these teachings.

It should be kept in mind that the Qur'ān has introduced the nation of Abraham (sws) with the words *مِلَّةَ قَيِّمَةٍ*. We have explained in detail the meaning of these words in an earlier discussion in this *tafsīr*. Here I shall

contend myself in citing just one verse:

قُلْ إِنِّي هَدَانِي رَبِّي إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ دِينًا قِيَمًا مِّلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا (١٦١:٦)

Say: "My Lord has guided me to a straight path: the natural religion the nation of Abraham, with complete devotion." (6:161)

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ وَالْمُشْرِكِينَ فِي نَارِ جَهَنَّمَ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا أُولَئِكَ هُمْ شَرُّ الْبَرِيَّةِ (٦:٦)⁶

This verse mentions the fate of people whether from the People of the Book or from the Idolaters who were adamant in rejecting the Qur'ān. Simultaneously, they are condemned for their conceit and pride which was the reason for this rejection.

In spite of being the recipients of the Book of God, if they too turned blind like the Idolaters, there is no reason that they be shown any lenience. It is also emphasized that Hell shall be their eternal abode and it will not be a temporary place of residence for them. Here, it should be noted, a specific view of the People of the Book referred to in the Qur'ān is being criticized. According to this view, they thought that in the first place fire would not touch them and if it did, it would not be for more than a few days.

The sentence *أُولَئِكَ هُمْ شَرُّ الْبَرِيَّةِ* (these very people are the worst of creatures) strikes at their pride and vanity. The condition to profess faith in the Qur'ān imposed by the leaders of the People of the Book and the Idolaters that unless an angel descends from the heavens whilst reading untouched pages or unless each of them is not handed open scriptures, they will not accept that Muḥammad (sws) was truthful in his claim to prophethood was because of their pride and vanity. As per this pride, they were not willing to obey and accept someone as a prophet of God who was inferior to them in worldly status. It was this pride of theirs which became a hindrance for them to accept the truth whereas the truth whether it is small or great is from God before whom it is essential for everyone to submit whether he is a king or a slave. If a person rejects the truth then he is from Satan's progeny and the progeny of Satan are the worst of creatures and Hell is their only abode.

6. Indeed, those among the People of the Book and the Idolaters who disbelieved shall be cast into the fire of Hell to dwell there forever. These very people are the worst of creatures.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمْ خَيْرُ الْبَرِيَّةِ (٧)⁷

This is a mention of the servants of God who cleansed themselves from the stigma of conceit. For this reason, the respect for the truth remained intact in them. When they heard the call of the Messenger, they did not make a demand similar to what was demanded by those overcome with conceit. On the other hand, they professed faith in the Book of God and did righteous deeds. The Qur'ān has said that such people are the best of creatures. This is because the real value of a person is not on the basis of his wealth and resources, family and lineage but on the basis of his intellectual and moral abilities. People who have these abilities are noble and of high status in the eyes of God even if they are slaves of Rome and Abyssinia. On the other hand, those who are devoid of these abilities are the worst of creatures in the eyes of God even if they are leaders of the Quraysh and the Hashimites. While reading this verse, one should refresh in one's mind the scorns and rebukes of the Quraysh which they would hurl on the poor among the Muslims when they had newly embraced faith. After such a humiliating attitude from them, who can imagine how happy these Muslims would have been after such praise for them from the Lord of the heavens and the earth.

It should also be kept in consideration that man is the best of God's creation as is mentioned in Sūrah Tīn. The Almighty has created him in the best of moulds with great abilities. If he recognizes his value, he is the best of God's creatures: no other creature of God can rival him. However, if he leads a life while remaining indifferent to his real value he becomes the worst of God's creatures and a true depiction of **ثُمَّ رَدَدْنَاهُ** (Then We turned him to the lowest when he himself acted low, 95:5). Then he falls into such disgrace that no other creature can match him. Just as there is no limit to man's ascent, there is no limit to his descent. What a splendid piece of advice is sounded by sages who have said: "Man! Know thyself."

جَزَاؤُهُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ جَنَّاتٌ عَدْنٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا أَبَدًا رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ وَرَضُوا عَنْهُ ذَلِكَ لِمَنْ خَشِيَ رَبَّهُ (٨)⁸

Mentioned in this verse is the reward of those who are the best of

7. Indeed, those who embraced faith and did righteous deeds, they, indeed, are the best of creatures.

8. Their reward with Allah is the gardens of eternity beneath which rivers flow. They will dwell there forever. God is pleased with them and they with Him. This is the reward of him who feared his Lord.

God's creatures. Though they will have to go through the trials and tests destined for them in this world, however they will have such gardens to live in with their Lord below which rivers flow and they will live in them eternally.

We have explained the words جَنَّاتٍ عَدْنٍ elsewhere in this *tafsīr*.

The sentence رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ وَرَضُوا عَنْهُ refers to the fact that these people would be pleased with their Lord and He would be pleased with them. God would be pleased with them because they fulfilled their obligation of serving and worshipping Him to the utmost and in the way He had told them to do so. They would be pleased with God because He not only fulfilled His promises, He also blessed them what they could not have even imagined.

The last part of the verse ذَلِكَ لِمَنْ خَشِيَ رَبَّهُ says that this state will be achieved by those who feared their Lord even though they could not see Him. The implication is that the foolish who want to believe only after witnessing everything from their eyes will continue to wander in darkness. No one can cure them. In this world, the real trial of a person is that while using his intellect and wisdom he should profess faith in realities of which he has been informed of by the Prophets of God. He should not live with closed eyes and ears nor should he wait to profess faith once everything is shown to him. Whoever succeeded in this trial would be worthy of being blessed by the Almighty with His favours. He who failed in this trial is worse than an animal and is not worthy of receiving any blessings from the Almighty.

By the grace of God, with these lines we reach the end of this *sūrah's tafsīr*. فالحمد لله حمدا كثيرا (profound gratitude be to God)

Lahore,
14 March, 1980 AD
6 Jamādī al-Awwal, 1400 AH

Sūrah Zilzāl

Structure and Theme

In this *Sūrah*, the reality that a day will definitely come when every deed done by man is brought to light is depicted. All his labours will be exposed and nothing will remain hidden. Whatever good or evil he had done even where no one could have seen him will be placed in front of him, and he will be rewarded or punished accordingly. On that day, each man alone will stand answerable for his own deeds. No other person will in any way be able to help or support him nor will anyone be present to intercede for him.

To elucidate this fact, a graphic picture of the tremendous cataclysm which will take place on that day is drawn. As a result of this devastation, everything buried in the earth will be cast out. The earth will then narrate its story at the intimation of the Almighty, enabling its inhabitants to have a clear idea of all what they had said or done upon its surface or had hidden beneath it. After this every person will see the smallest good he had done as well as all his evils, however imperceptible they may be.

During the time of the Prophet (sws), those who used to deny the Day of Judgement had basically three misconceptions. Firstly, they had extreme doubts about the destruction of this world. Secondly, they reckoned that it was not possible to keep an account of all the deeds of each and every person. Thirdly, they were of the opinion that even if the above two were true, there was no need for them to be fearful because the deities they had associated with God would intercede for them and would save them from any punishment. They went as far as to believe that these intercessors would even win for them a high rank and status in the Hereafter. All these three misconceptions are dealt with in this *sūrah*, and their hollowness is categorically pointed out.

Text and Translation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
إِذَا زُلْزِلَتِ الْأَرْضُ زِلْزَالَهَا (١) وَأَخْرَجَتِ الْأَرْضُ أَثْقَالَهَا (٢) وَقَالَ الْإِنْسَانُ مَا لَهَا (٣)
يَوْمَئِذٍ تُحَدِّثُ أَخْبَارَهَا (٤) بِأَنَّ رَبَّكَ أَوْحَى لَهَا (٥)

يَوْمَئِذٍ يَصْدُرُ النَّاسُ أَشْتَاتًا لِّيُرَوْا أَعْمَالَهُمْ (٦) فَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ خَيْرًا يَرَهُ (٧)
وَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ شَرًّا يَرَهُ (٨)

When the earth is shaken the way it ought to be shaken, and the earth casts forth its burdens and man cries out: What is the matter with her?! On that Day, she will narrate her story at the intimation of your Lord. (1-5)

On that Day, men will appear alone so that their deeds can be shown to them. Then whoever has done the smallest bit of good will see it, and whoever has done the smallest bit of evil will also see it. (6-8)

Explanation

إِذَا زُلْزِلَتِ الْأَرْضُ زِلْزَالَهَا^١

If the various usages of the Arabic language are kept in consideration, the word إِذَا (when) used in this manner serves as a reminder of what comes after it. One can unfold this meaning as: “Keep that time in mind” or “Beware when such and such a thing will happen”.

The word زُلْزَالَ is grammatically an absolute object (*maf'ul-i-mutliq*) which stresses the verb زُلْزِلَتْ. However, its annexation (*idāfat*) to the word أَرْضُ (earth) by means of a pronoun is adding a special meaning in the stress which must be borne in mind, otherwise the emphasis in the verse cannot be properly appreciated. Keeping in mind this technical delicacy, the correct meaning is: “when the earth shall be shaken the way it ought to be shaken” or: “when the earth shall be shaken the way it is destined to be shaken”. In other words, what is really being implied here is that the extent to which it will be shaken cannot be imagined today. The actual way in which it will reel, totter and stagger as pre-ordained by the Almighty is an event beyond imagination. But one thing which is absolutely certain is that all this is bound to happen. Therefore, it is in the well being of a person to remain alert about its arrival and not spend his life remaining unmindful to it.

وَأَخْرَجَتِ الْأَرْضُ أَثْقَالَهَا^٢

The word أَثْقَلُ means “weight” or “burden”. Here, its foremost connotation are the dead who have been buried in the earth and who will be thrown overboard by it on the Day of Judgement. But, since the word is also used in the general sense, it can also imply the buried riches and

1. When the earth is shaken the way it ought to be shaken

2. And the earth shall cast forth its burdens.

treasures as well as any traces of the hidden offences committed by criminals. I have already explained this under the following verse of Sūrah Inshiqāq: (٤:٨٤) وَأَلْقَتْ مَا فِيهَا وَتَخَلَّتْ (it will cast out whatever is inside and become empty, (84:4)) and will explain further under the following verse of the next sūrah: (٩:١٠٠) أَفَلَا يَعْلَمُ إِذَا بُعْثِرَ مَا فِي الْقُبُورِ (when the graves will be spewed out, (100:9)).

وَقَالَ الْإِنْسَانُ مَا لَهَا ³(٣)

This is a description of how the terrible situation will effect men's senses. Struck with consternation they will cry out: What is happening to the earth, why is its wobbling about not coming to an end and why is it throwing out everything within it? This tension will also grip the evil doers when they will observe the record of their deeds. In the words of the Qur'ān, they will exclaim: هَذَا الْكِتَابِ لَا يُغَادِرُ صَغِيرَةً وَلَا كَبِيرَةً إِلَّا أَحْصَاهَا (٤٩:١٨) (what a strange Book! No small or big deed has been left out from its grasp, (18:49)).

يَوْمَئِذٍ نُّحَدِّثُ أَخْبَارَهَا (٤) بِأَنَّ رَبَّكَ أَوْحَىٰ لَهَا ⁴(٥)

When the Day comes, the earth will narrate an account of all the good and evil deeds done upon it. It is indicated at other places of the Qur'ān that the limbs of criminals will be given the power of speech by the Almighty on the Day of Judgement. Their own limbs will testify against them, and even their skins and the hairs upon them will bear witness against them. In the words of the Qur'ān the criminals will inquire from their skins:

وَقَالُوا لِمَ شَهِدْتُمْ عَلَيْنَا قَالُوا أَنْطَقَنَا اللَّهُ الَّذِي أَنْطَقَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ وَهُوَ خَلَقَكُمْ
أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ (٢١:٤١)

And the sinners will ask from their skins: “Why did you testify against us?” They will: “The God who has given speech to everyone today has given it to us as well.” (41:21)

Whatever a person does in this world is either done upon or beneath the earth. As such, it must be regarded as the greatest witness to all his deeds. Just as the Almighty will endow man's limbs and organs with the faculty of speech to narrate his life's record and bear witness against

3. And man cries out: What is the matter with her?!

4. On that Day, she will narrate her story at the intimation of your Lord.

him, the earth also will be made vocal by Him that it may also recount his history.

The word *wahī* used in these verses means “intimation” or “indication”. It is used in this meaning in other verses of the Qur’ān as well, for example: (٥:٨٤) وَأَذِنَتْ لِرَبِّهَا وَحُقَّتْ (it will obey her God’s directive, and only this is befitting for her, (84:5)). It is clear that the earth will rehearse everyone’s record at the behest of God only. Whatever will happen will happen because the Almighty will order it and everything will be compelled to obey him. It can be seen that what has been stated in the above cited verse (41:21) is asserted here in a slightly different manner.

يَوْمَئِذٍ يَصْدُرُ النَّاسُ أَشْتَاتًا لِّيُرَوْا أَعْمَالُهُمْ⁵ (٦)

The word أَشْتَاتٌ means “in a separate or solitary manner”. In other words, on the Day of Judgement, people will emerge from their graves without having their family about them. None of their tribesmen or relatives, comrades or supporters will be present with them. Also, they will be without the pomp and show and the worldly riches they had amassed. Even the deities they had associated with God will not be present to intercede for them. Everyone will stand alone to reckon with the results of his own deeds. This particular aspect has been highlighted in other places of the Qur’ān as well. Thus in Sūrah Maryam, the words used are: (٩٥:١٩) وَكُلُّهُمْ آتِيهِ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ فَرْدًا (and everyone will appear alone before his Lord, (19:95)), while in Sūrah An ‘am, it is said: وَلَقَدْ جِئْتُمُونَا (and you came to Us alone, the way We created you the first time, (6:94)).

The words لِّيُرَوْا أَعْمَالُهُمْ (so that their deeds could be shown to them) express the reason why people will be brought before the Almighty. They will observe and experience the results of their labours done in the previous world. Linguistically, the verb “shown” here is used to denote its own outcome.

فَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ خَيْرًا يَرَهُ (٧) وَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ شَرًّا يَرَهُ (٨)⁶

These are the details which relate to the last part of the previous verse. No doubt, every person will see both his evil and good deeds but this will be according to the principle mentioned elsewhere in the Qur’ān: A believer may not see some of his evil deeds because some of the good

5. On that day, men will appear alone so that their deeds can be shown to them.

6. Then whoever has done the smallest bit of good will see it, and whoever has done the smallest bit of evil will also see it.

ones will have compensated for them. Similarly, a disbeliever will not find all his good deeds in his record because some of his misdeeds and heretical beliefs will have rendered them null and void, eluding him from their reward.

After being adjudged according to this principle, people will attain eternal salvation or will be doomed forever on the basis of the following Qur'ānic verse:

فَأَمَّا مَنْ ثَقُلَتْ مَوَازِينُهُ فَهُوَ فِي عِيشَةٍ رَّاضِيَةٍ وَأَمَّا مَنْ خَفَّتْ مَوَازِينُهُ فَأُمُّهُ هَاوِيَةٌ

(١٠١: ٦-٩)

Hence, whose scales are heavy will dwell in bliss, and whose scales are light, the abyss of Hell will be his abode. (101:6-9)

Sūrah ‘Ādiyāt

Subject Matter and its Sequence

In this *sūrah*, man has been warned and rebuked for being ungrateful. He is informed that whatever he obtains in this world is through the means and resources which the Almighty has blessed him with. However, he forgets the reality that when everything has been obtained by God’s grace and blessings some obligations are imposed on him with regard to God which must necessarily be fulfilled. He not only does not acknowledge these obligations but openly uses his God-gifted abilities and skills against God Himself. He also does not care a bit that a day is to come when nothing shall remain concealed; even the secrets of the hearts shall be revealed. The Almighty will settle their account with all His knowledge and accordingly reward and punish them.

In other words, the subject matter of this *sūrah* is the same as the previous one: Sūrah Zilzāl; however, there is a difference between both *sūrahs*: the first portrays the day when all this will happen and the second cites the reason which entails the coming of that day, as shall be explained later.

The sequence in which the subject matter is arranged is that amongst the various animals which have been put to man’s service by the Almighty, the bravery, diligence and sacrifices displayed by war horses in obedience and love for their masters are initially cited as evidence. Later, man is rebuked for showing ungratefulness and ingratitude to the Almighty. He is reproached for not seeking a lesson from the obedience of his slaves and those subservient to him. Why does he not realize that he too is a slave to a master, a servant to a lord and nurtured by a cherisher and that it is incumbent upon him too that he should serve his Lord and eagerly obey Him like these animals do; in fact, he should be even more obedient. At the end, man is rebuked for his stinginess and greed: he receives everything from God but he tries to hide and save what he has from Him; but till when and where can he conceal his possessions. One day, all the treasures of this earth and all secrets of the hearts are bound to be revealed. Only a person who prepares for such a day can be regarded as wise.

Text and Translation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
 وَالْعَادِيَاتِ ضَبْحًا (١) فَالْمُورِيَاتِ قَدْحًا (٢) فَالْمُغِيرَاتِ صُبْحًا (٣) فَأَثَرْنَ بِهِ نَقْعًا (٤)
 فَوَسَطْنَ بِهِ جَمْعًا (٥) إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لِرَبِّهِ لَكَنُودٌ (٦) وَإِنَّهُ عَلَىٰ ذَٰلِكَ لَشَهِيدٌ (٧) وَإِنَّهُ لِحُبِّ
 الْخَيْرِ لَشَدِيدٌ (٨) أَفَلَا يَعْلَمُ إِذَا بُعْثِرَ مَا فِي الْقُبُورِ (٩) وَحُصِّلَ مَا فِي الصُّدُورِ (١٠) إِنَّ
 رَبَّهُمْ بِهِمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ لَّخَبِيرٌ (١١)

In the name of Allah, the most Gracious, the ever Merciful.

Panting, galloping horses, producing fire by thumping their hooves, launching assaults at dawn, generating dust from their dash and barging into a throng with the dust bear witness. (1-5)

That man is very ungrateful to his Lord. And he himself is a witness to this attitude. And he is very fond of wealth. (6-8)

Is he not aware of the time when graves are laid open and secrets of the hearts are revealed? Indeed, on that Day, their Lord shall be well aware of them. (9-11)

Explanation

وَالْعَادِيَاتِ ضَبْحًا (١)¹

الْعَادِيَاتِ means “to run”. Here it is mentioned as an adjective for war horses. The reason for this deduction is that the four adjectives used subsequently cannot but be applicable to horses used in war. Some people think that it refers to the camels of Muzdalifah; however, there is nothing which corroborates this deduction. The adjectives mentioned subsequently cannot be related to camels, as is just indicated.

Another opinion is that the word refers to the horses of the warriors. Again there is nothing which can be cited in favour of this inference especially because the discourse will have no relation with the *muqsam 'alayh* which is found in the sixth verse: إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لِرَبِّهِ لَكَنُودٌ (that man is very ungrateful to his Lord). What relationship can these words of the *muqsam 'alayh* can have with the horses of the warriors and the combatants.

Both these interpretations are based on the false notion that it is essential that things which are sworn by should be sacred. We have negated this false notion at many places in this exegesis. The real thing is the testimony of a thing (*muqsam bihi*) over a premise (*muqsam 'alayh*) which is stated

1. Panting, galloping horses.

later. We shall later indicate the various aspects through which this oath sworn by the horses is a testimony to the ungratefulness of man.

صَبَّحٌ refers to the specific sound which comes out from the nostrils of panting horses. This special state of the horses in which they are out of breath bears open testimony how obedient and diligent they are in fulfilling the purpose for which they have been made subservient to man and to the fact that to carry out a task of their masters how dutifully they expend the last bit of their energy.

فَالْمُورِيَّاتِ قَدْحًا²(٢)

We have explained at various places in this exegesis that when clauses or sentences are co-ordinated by the particle *fay* (ف) the things which are co-ordinated are not only in sequence, the adjectives co-ordinated also relate to a single noun.

مُورِيَّاتِ is from the verbal noun إِيرَاء and it means to produce fire from a flint-stone or some other thing.

قَدْحٌ here means to hit and to strike with the feet and to smack something with another.

This is a portrayal of the diligence and determination of horses in carrying out the tasks of their masters. Such is their gallop that when their hooves strike the ground sparks of fire emanate from it. When the horses scurry forth on a rocky terrain to raid the enemy, these hooves which are iron-clad strike the ground with such force that sparks come out of it the way they do from a flint-stone. It is as if they are running on embers to please their masters.

فَالْمُغِيرَاتِ صُبْحًا³(٣)

Stated in this verse is the real purpose for which these horses risk their lives and raid the enemy at dawn. In Arabia, this time was considered the most appropriate to plunder an enemy and hence the use of the word صُبْحًا. The shout of وَاصْبَاحًا which was like an alarm sounded before such an onslaught in Arabia also mentions dawn for this reason. So much so, the word صَبَّحَ became a common word to imply plunder.

فَأَتْرَنَ بِهِ نَفْعًا⁴(٤)

نَفْعٌ means “to make something rise” and “to incite” and نَفْعٌ means “dust”.

2. Producing fire by thumping their hooves.

3. Launching assaults at dawn.

4. Generating dust from their dash.

If the **ب** in **بِهِ** is regarded to be an adverb of place (ظرف) and the antecedent of the pronoun in **بِهِ** is regarded to be **صُبْحًا** then the verse would mean that when they raid the enemy they raise a storm of dust; it is as if a hurricane has been let loose on them.

If on the other hand this antecedent is regarded to be the gallop alluded to in the first verse, then the verse would mean that they generate dust from this gallop.

In both cases, the purpose is to highlight the importance of horses in war. Their advent is not the advent of the pleasant breeze of dawn; it is rather like the advent of a whirlwind.

فَوَسَّطَنَ بِهِ جَمْعًا⁵

The letter **ب** is for **مُلاَبَسَة** (association) and the antecedent of the pronoun in **بِهِ** is **نَفْعًا**. In other words, they pierce into the throng of their enemies not fearing their spears and swords to the slightest. They hold the task assigned to them by their masters dearer to them than their own lives. To accomplish it they take the initiative disregarding every form of danger and this is actually what is befitting for them.

إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لِرَبِّهِ لَكَنُودٌ⁶

This is the real premise for which oaths have been sworn as evidence.

The word **كَنُودٌ** signifies an ungrateful person who does not value the favours of his Lord.

The implication is that a person who witnesses this utter obedience of the horses and also benefits from their sacrifices is not able to comprehend that he too is the slave of his Lord is an absolutely ungrateful person. How more ungrateful can he be if he does not realize that it is his obligation to show diligence and assiduousness in obeying God that like these horses. The reason is that whilst even an animal knows the rights of his master, he as a human being does not acknowledge the right of his Lord.

It should be kept in consideration that horses are mentioned here as an example. The same faithfulness and selflessness is found in every animal which has been put to the service of man by the Almighty. Consequently, the Qur'ān after mentioning them in various places has stimulated the emotions of gratitude in man. In particular, the service and benefits provided by camels are mentioned at numerous places in the Qur'ān. Man has been urged to seek a lesson from their devotion, hard-work and

5. And barging into a throng with the dust.

6. That man is very ungrateful to his Lord.

patience; just as they dutifully submit to their masters, in the same manner it is the duty of man to submit before his Lord who has put an animal as huge and as beneficial as the camel to the service of man.

The reason that horses are specially mentioned here is that in those times they had great importance in launching an onslaught on the enemy as well as for defending against an attack because the responsibility of protecting a clan or a tribe rested with the clan and tribe themselves. In those times, every person needed to keep high pedigree war horses for the defence of his family and these horses occupied great status and significance for them. They are very commonly mentioned in classical Arabic poetry. It is not possible for me to cite the numerous couplets about horses with which this poetry is replete. I am restricting myself to just one couplet of a Ḥamāsī poet so that readers can have some idea of their taste:⁷

و في فرس نهد عتيق جعلته
حجابا لبيتي ثمه أخدمته عبدا

(And I spend my wealth on a young and thorough-bred horse who I have made the sentinel of my house and then kept a slave for its service.)

It is obvious that this value and importance of horses is because of their services and selfless devotion for their masters. If horses did not serve their needs, they would neither have spent their wealth on them nor extolled them. This is a proof of the fact that man is not unaware of the fact that the real value of a servant depends on his services; however, he forgets this in his own case and wants to disobey each and every directive of the Almighty of whom he is a servant and at the same time wants that he be rewarded the most in the Hereafter.

Another aspect of man's ungratefulness needs attention: he is neither the creator of the horses nor of things by means of which they are nourished; in spite of this, these horses bravely serve man only because God has put them to man's service. On the other hand, the Almighty is man's Creator as well as of all other animals who are of use to him and all other means and resources of his sustenance but still man is indifferent to his obligation of serving and worshipping the Almighty.

وَإِنَّهُ عَلَىٰ ذَٰلِكَ لَشَهِيدٌ⁸ (٧)

There is no need to find any evidence for man's ungratefulness. He

7. Al-Tabrayzī, *Dīwān al-ḥamāsah*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dār al-qalam, n.d.), 38.

8. And he himself is a witness to this attitude

himself is the greatest witness to it. This verse is similar to the following verse of Sūrah Qiyamah: (١٥-١٤ : ٧٥) بَلِّ الْإِنْسَانُ عَلَىٰ نَفْسِهِ بَصِيرَةٌ وَلَوْ أَلْقَىٰ مَعَاذِيرَهُ (in fact, man himself is a witness upon his own self however much he may put up excuses, (75:14-15)).

Things which are obvious requisites of human nature do not need any argument for proof. The greatest testimony in their favour is found in man's nature and his conscience. If he evades these things, then this is not because he does not find any argument in their favour; it is because he finds them against his base desires and thus tries to find excuses to evade them. Otherwise what is the reason that he himself only values and treasures the horses which ably serve him but thinks that good and evil people would be treated equally by his Lord? He further contends that His Lord would grant him even more favours in the Hereafter even if he does not obey a single directive of His and spends his life as a slave to his base desires.

وَإِنَّهُ لِحُبِّ الْخَيْرِ لَشَدِيدٌ⁹

Presented in this verse is a testimony to man's ungratefulness from his own character. He is infatuated with the love of wealth. He could have at least observed his obedient horses how they whilst bearing the onslaught of spears and putting their lives into danger present to their masters whatever they reap and never demand anything from them. They are content with whatever their masters feed them. On the other hand, whatever favours man is blessed by the Almighty are regarded by him to be the result of his own planning and skill and like a snake guards this treasure. He does not acknowledge any right of his Lord on these favours and if someone reminds him of this, he conceitedly negates the role of God in granting him these and regards them to be the consequence of his own hard-work and competence: (٧٨:٢٨) إِنَّمَا أُوتِيْتُهُ عَلَىٰ عِلْمٍ عِنْدِي (these [riches] have been given to me on account of the knowledge I possess, (28:78)).

The word خَيْر here means "wealth". This is a common meaning of the word and has been used thus in the Qur'ān also. The being really worthy of man's love is the one who has created him and is his Lord and with whose blessings he receives all what he has in this world. Consequently, the Qur'ān whilst describing true believers has stated that when they are faced with a situation in which there is a clash between the requisites of their own selves and those of the Almighty, they show that they love God more and disregard the requisites of their own selves: وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَشَدُّ

9. And he is very fond of wealth

(١٦٥:٢) حَبَّاءُ لِلَّهِ (and the believers are the most stern in their love for God, (2:165)). On the other hand, people who are ungrateful hold their wealth dearer to them than their Lord.

أَفَلَا يَعْلَمُ إِذَا بُعْثِرَ مَا فِي الْقُبُورِ (٩) وَحُصِّلَ مَا فِي الصُّدُورِ (١٠)¹⁰

This verse sounds a warning to people who are ungrateful and avaricious. That the dead will be extracted from the graves is very evident; however, since this sentence is uttered in the context of a warning for the greedy, hence this is evidence to the fact that the treasures which these stingy people buried in the ground whilst usurping the rights of God and his people are also implied here. The word بُعْثِرَ means to separate and split something which is collected in order to inspect it. In other words, on that day nothing will remain concealed; everything will come to the forefront.

On that day, like the treasures buried in the earth, the secrets buried in the hearts of men will also be gathered so that each person can be presented an evidence of the motives of all his deeds. It is evident that whatever evil a person perpetrates, he wants to legalize it by trying to find a good motive behind it in order to lull the calls of his conscience to sleep and also save himself from the criticism and degradation of others. In particular, people who pose to be religious or are in a position of leadership or have a desire to be in such a position cannot do anything without such a justification. In order to conceal their inner-self from people, they are able to invent a garb for themselves. Such clever people are warned in this verse that on that day not only the record of their deeds will be showed to them, but also the record of their motives will be presented to them. Readers are advised to take a look at what has been written under the last verse of Sūrah Zilzāl, the previous *sūrah* so that all related aspects become clear.

إِنَّ رَبَّهُمْ بِهِمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ لَّخَبِيرٌ (١١)¹¹

This verse emphasizes the warning sounded in the earlier verse. The Almighty is aware of the deeds and motives of all people even today; however, it is against His wisdom to reveal everything today. But the Day of Judgment will come for the very reason that each person is shown his record. When this is done, others too will know how well aware the Almighty was of their inner and outer selves.

10. Is he not aware of the time when graves are laid open and secrets of the hearts are revealed.

11. Indeed, on that Day, their Lord shall be well aware of them.

We now come to the end of the *tafsīr* of this *sūrah*. فَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ عَلَى فَضْلِهِ وَ إِحْسَانِهِ (So all gratitude be to God for His blessing and favour).

Lahore,

7th April, 1980 AD

20th Jamādī al-Awwal 1400 AH

Sūrah Qāriah

Central Theme

The basic teaching of this *sūrah* is that the Day of Judgement about which man is being forewarned is destined to come. No one has any prior knowledge about its arrival, which will be as sudden as an unexpected rap at the door. One should always remain apprehensive about it and be wise enough to be always in a position to anticipate its arrival. On that day, people will emerge from their graves as scattered moths appear in the rainy season; everyone will be too busy in contemplating the fate which awaits him than to think about his family. No one will be in a position to help anyone else. The tremendous convulsion will render the mountains into tufts of carded wool let alone small fortifications or entrenchments. On that day, man will only benefit from his good deeds. God will set up the Balance of Justice in which all of man's deeds will be weighed. If the good deeds outweigh the evil ones, he will dwell in eternal bliss and if the evil deeds tilt the scales, the scorching pit of Hell will be his eternal abode.

Text and Translation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
الْقَارِعَةُ (١) مَا الْقَارِعَةُ (٢) وَمَا أَذْرَاكَ مَا الْقَارِعَةُ (٣) يَوْمَ يَكُونُ النَّاسُ كَالْفَرَاشِ
الْمَبْثُوثِ (٤) وَتَكُونُ الْجِبَالُ كَالْعِهْنِ الْمَنْفُوشِ (٥) فَأَمَّا مَنْ ثَقُلَتْ مَوَازِينُهُ (٦) فَهُوَ فِي
عِيشَةٍ رَاضِيَةٍ (٧) وَأَمَّا مَنْ خَفَّتْ مَوَازِينُهُ (٨) فَأُمُّهُ هَاوِيَةٌ (٩) وَمَا أَذْرَاكَ مَا هِيَةٌ (١٠)
نَارٌ حَامِيَةٌ (١١)

The Pounding one!

What is the Pounding one!?

And what do you imagine what the Pounding one is? (1-3)

On that day, people will be like scattered moths and mountains like tufts of carded wool. (4-5)

Then whose scales are heavy shall dwell in bliss and whose scales are light, the abyss shall be their abode. And what do you imagine what that is!? Raging Fire!! (6-11)

Explanation¹ الْقَارِعَةُ (١)

Among other names, this is one of the names of the Day of Judgement. It means “the pounding one” or the “the rapping one”. The Arabic phrase قَرَعَ الْبَابَ, means “he pounded or rapped at the door”. This name indicates a special feature of the Day of Judgement: it will come as abruptly and as suddenly as an unexpected bang at the front door of a house at night which strikes panic among the dwellers inside. Like a bolt from the blue it will alight and catch everyone unaware. It will create a tremendous cataclysm in this universe and everything will be annihilated. Hidden in this name also is a warning that since no one has any foreknowledge about the time of its arrival and since it will be the biggest upheaval in the universe, it is in the well being of everyone to always remain fearful of it. The particular style adopted here has a ring of an alarm about it in order to caution everyone to be on their vigil and anticipate the arrival of this disaster. It can be said that the immense turbulence which will be created at the advent of that Day is somewhat being created before its arrival by the very clamour of its name.

² مَا الْقَارِعَةُ (٢)

This question serves to magnify the severity of the alarm, warning those who regard the Day of Judgement as an ordinary affair and have become indifferent to its implications. It cautions and urges them to seriously think about something which is bound to happen and to prepare themselves to negotiate its aftermath.

³ وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا الْقَارِعَةُ (٣)

This special Qur’ānic style, often used elsewhere, is meant to lament and deplore the foolishness of the addressees about such a significant event. It is in the form of an inquiry about their estimation of the severity of a calamity which will suddenly waylay them. It urges them to reflect on the dreadful fate of those who are ridiculing it, even after being warned about it time and again.

1. The Pounding one!

2. What is the Pounding one!?

3. What do you imagine what the pounding one is!?

يَوْمَ يَكُونُ النَّاسُ كَالْفَرَاشِ الْمَبْثُوثِ (٤)⁴

This is a graphic description of the situation which will arise on that day, when people will emerge from their graves like scattered moths. Everyone will stand alone to reckon with the results of his deeds. No one will have his family or clan about him nor any of his tribesmen or comrades to defend him. Even other deities he associated with God and other intercessors on whom he was depending upon will not be present to lessen his burdens. The Qur'ān explicitly says:

يَوْمَئِذٍ يَصْدُرُ النَّاسُ أَشْتَاتًا لِّيُرَوْا أَعْمَالَهُمْ (٦:٩٩)

On that day, men will emerge from their graves alone so that their deeds can be shown to them. (99:6)

فَإِذَا نُفِخَ فِي الصُّورِ فَلَا أَنْسَابَ بَيْنَهُمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ وَلَا يَتَسَاءَلُونَ فَمَنْ ثَقُلَتْ مَوَازِينُهُ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ وَمَنْ خَفَّتْ مَوَازِينُهُ فَأُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ خَسِرُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ فِي جَهَنَّمَ خَالِدُونَ (٢٣:١٠١-١٠٣)

So when the trumpet is sounded, the blood relations between them will be no more on that day, nor will they be able to ask for each other's help. And only those whose scales of good deeds are heavy shall attain salvation and whose scales are light shall be the ones who have incurred a loss and shall forever abide in Hell. (23:101-103)

وَلَا يَسْأَلُ حَمِيمٌ حَمِيمًا يُبْصَرُونَ يَوْمَ الْمُجْرِمِ لَوْ يَفْتَدِي مِنْ عَذَابِ يَوْمِئِذٍ بِبَنِيهِ وَصَاحِبَتِهِ وَأَخِيهِ وَفَصِيلَتِهِ الَّتِي تُؤْوِيهِ وَمَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ جَمِيعًا ثُمَّ يُنْجِيهِ (٧٠:١٠-١٤)

On that day, no friend will inquire about his friend though they will be shown to each other. The sinner will wish to give away his children, his wife, his brother and his kinsfolk who gave him shelter, and all the people of the earth, as ransom if this could deliver him. (70:10-14)

وَتَكُونُ الْجِبَالُ كَالْعِهْنِ الْمَنْفُوشِ (٥)⁵

This verse means that on that day like tribal and family support and backing, the refuge and shelter provided by buildings, forts, citadels and other similar structures will be no more. Mountains will be rendered into

4. On that Day, people will be like scattered moths.

5. And the mountains will be like tufts of carded wool.

tufts of carded wool. This simile vividly portrays the fact that just as in the case of carded wool each fibre is completely set asunder, so shall be each particle of a mountain. The Arabic word **عِهْنٌ** is used for that wool which after having being carded and given colour has become ready for weaving.

Mountains are specially mentioned here because at that time those who were denying the Day of Reckoning regarded them as eternally indestructable. They used to mockingly ask the Prophet (sws) whether such huge structures would be destroyed on that day. This question has been quoted elsewhere in the *Qur'ān* and has been answered here in this verse.

فَأَمَّا مَنْ ثَقُلَتْ مَوَازِينُهُ (٦) فَهُوَ فِي عِيشَةٍ رَاضِيَةٍ (٧)⁶

The only things considered worthwhile on that day will be a man's good deeds. Only those whose good deeds outnumber their evil ones will attain salvation and all others will be doomed forever. A special Balance of Justice meant only to weigh the deeds of men, will be erected on that day, as mentioned in the *Qur'ān*:

وَنَضَعُ الْمَوَازِينَ الْقِسْطَ لِيَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ (٤٧:٢١)

And for the Day of Judgement, We will set up a special Balance of Justice (21:47)

A special characteristic of this Balance as mentioned in Sūrah `Arāf is that only truth (good deeds) will be able to tilt it. Evil (bad deeds) will have no weight in its scales:

وَالْوَزْنُ يَوْمَئِذٍ الْحَقُّ فَمَنْ ثَقُلَتْ مَوَازِينُهُ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ وَمَنْ خَفَّتْ مَوَازِينُهُ فَأُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ خَسِرُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ بِمَا كَانُوا بِآيَاتِنَا يَظْلِمُونَ (٧:٨-٩)

On that day, the truth only will have weight. So, those whose scales are heavy shall attain salvation, and those whose scales are light shall be the ones who have incurred a loss because they wronged their souls by denying Our revelations. (7:8-9)

The relative singular pronoun **مَنْ** as used in the verse above denotes plurality.

By saying that such people shall dwell in bliss is meant that not only will they be granted whatever they wish for but also what they cannot

6. Then whose scales are heavy shall dwell in bliss.

even imagine.

وَأَمَّا مَنْ خَفَّتْ مَوَازِينُهُ (٨) فَأُمُّهُ هَاوِيَةٌ (٩) وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا هِيَ (١٠) نَارٌ حَامِيَةٌ (١١)⁷

This is a description of the fate of those whose evil deeds have no weight in the Balance of Justice. Whatever good deeds they may have brought with them will be rendered useless due to their ill-intentions and heretical beliefs. The scorching pit of Hell will be their eternal abode.

The Arabic word أُمُّ means “mother” but here it very aptly denotes a resort or a dwelling.

The ة at the end of the word مَا هِيَ is to maintain the rhyme of the verses by taking into consideration the conventional pause at the end of a verse.

7. And those whose scales are light, the abyss shall be their abode. And what do you imagine what that is!? Raging Fire!!

Sūrah Takāthur

Central Theme

Sūrah Takāthur forms a pair with Sūrah Qāri‘ah, the preceding *sūrah*. There is no essential difference between the topics discussed in the two. In Sūrah Qāri‘ah, it is pointed out that only the good deeds done in this world will be of any use to a person in the Hereafter; they only will have weight in the Balance of Justice. A person whose good deeds abound will attain salvation, while a person whose evil deeds outnumber the good ones, however much a treasure he might have amassed, will be doomed forever. Grief and regret will be his only companions.

In this *sūrah*, people who have confined all their efforts to achieve worldly gains, and whose aim in life has remained nothing but to outdo one another in the acquisition of wealth, are warned of the dreadful fate which awaits them. They are the ones who spent their lives in the lust and greed for money, and always remained possessed with an insatiable desire to accumulate the luxuries and riches of this world. Throughout their lives, they remained so occupied with this dash for wealth that they forgot the Day when they would be held accountable for all their deeds. A day wherein they would be flung into the raging fire of hell, if they would fail to justify their deeds. They would be inquired about everything they had acquired, the manner in which it was acquired, and the way it was expended and consumed. They would be questioned about how they used their abilities, skills and other blessings given to them by the Almighty; whether they used them to please Him or employed them to satisfy their own lusts and gratify Satan.

Meaning of the Sūrah

أَلْهَاكُمْ السَّكَائِرُ (١) حَتَّى زُرْتُمُ الْمَقَابِرَ (٢) كَلَّا سَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ (٣) ثُمَّ كَلَّا سَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ (٤) كَلَّا لَوْ تَعْلَمُونَ عِلْمَ الْيَقِينِ (٥) لَتَرَوُنَّ الْجَحِيمَ (٦) ثُمَّ لَتَرَوُنَّهَا عَيْنَ الْيَقِينِ (٧) ثُمَّ لَتَسْأَلَنَّ يَوْمَئِذٍ عَنِ النَّعِيمِ (٨)

The desire to surpass one another in the acquisition of wealth has allured you until you reached the graves. By no means! you will soon come to know! Yes, By no means! you will soon come to know! (1-4)

By no means! if you knew with certainty that you would surely come

across Hell, and you would observe it by your very eyes, and you would be questioned about these favours, then ...(5-8)

Explanation of the Sūrah

أَلْهَاكُمْ التَّكَاثُرُ¹

أَلْهَا means “to allure” and “to deceive”.

تَكَاثُرٌ means “abundance in wealth and children”.

According to the custom in the pre-Islamic Arab society, a family was responsible for the defence and security of a tribe. Due to this reason, the family which had the largest number of individuals was entrusted with this task. This naturally resulted in a race to outdo one other not only in the accretion of wealth, but also in the size of a family. Anyone who has studied their customs and traditions knows that they used to take a lot of pride in not only outdoing one another in wealth but also in having a large family. In present times, with the change in the social set up, this situation has also changed. Specially, due to the widely acclaimed concept of family-planning, the general trend is to raise the standard of living by having as small a family as possible. Almost all people seem to be afflicted with this malady, and one seldom comes across anyone who has not been a prey to this contagious disease. Also, since no upper limit has been fixed in the standard of living, their thirst for wealth never quenches, and in fact every bit gathered makes them yearn for more. They have been caught in a vicious circle, and there seems no end to this race for material gains. As no limit has been set for the standard of living, the rate at which their greed is continuing to increase, is much more than the rate at which the standard of living itself is increasing. It is this which the Qur’ān terms as تَكَاثُرٌ, and asserts that it effectively allures a person to the extent that he becomes unmindful to the other important realities of life. He is so overcome by the desire to acquire worldly riches that he becomes totally indifferent to the life that awaits him in the Hereafter.

حَتَّىٰ زُرْتُمُ الْمَقَابِرَ²

This means that their whole life is spent in the acquisition of wealth and material benefits, till the final resting place is encountered. In Arabic, the verbal noun, زَيَّارَت, from which the word زُرْتُمْ is derived, simply means “to see”, contrary to its connotation in Urdu, where a certain amount of holiness and sanctity is also attached to this meaning.

1. The desire to surpass one other in the acquisition of wealth has allured you.

2. Until you reached the graves.

Hence, زُرْتُمْ means: “you saw the graves” that is ‘you were consigned to the graves’. To quote a Ḥamāsī poet:

إذا زرت أرضاً بعد طول إجتناها
فقدت صديقي و البلاد كما هيا

(When I see my place years after remaining away from it, it seems as if I have lost all my friends, but the place is the same as it was before.)

Although there was an Arabic tradition, according to which the Arabs used to keep an account of the graves of their people and proudly mentioned them in their gatherings, but this is not implied here. But, indeed one wonders why the expression حَتَّى زُرْتُمُ الْمَقَابِرَ has been used by the Qur’ān, instead of simply saying “until death overtook you”. In my opinion, the reason behind adopting this particular style is firstly, to maintain the rhyme of the verses and secondly, to express regret and pity over the unfortunate people, who have deprived themselves of the reward in the Hereafter by indulging in a relentless race for wealth.

كَلَّا سَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ (٣) ثُمَّ كَلَّا سَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ (٤)³

This serves as a forceful intimation to those who consider material success in life all that one must strive for. It sounds a warning to those who after being explained everything, are not willing to open their eyes to the actual reality. It cautions them that this life whose charms have allured them so much is not the end. In fact, the life in the Hereafter which at the moment is invisible to them is the life for which they must really strive for, which very soon they will behold from their very eyes.

The double stress in these verses is to make this warning more efficacious, as well as to express the fact that a nation which rejects and denies the message of a prophet directly assigned towards them, faces severe punishment not only in this world, but also in the next. In other words, it admonishes them to either mend their ways or get ready to face this double humiliation – for a decision about their fate is about to be made.

The threat hidden beneath the word تَعْلَمُونَ (you will come to know) is too evident to be described in words.

3. By no means! you will soon come to know. Yes, By no means! you will soon come to know.

كَلَّا لَوْ تَعْلَمُونَ عِلْمَ الْيَقِينِ (٥) لَتَرَوُنَّ الْجَحِيمَ (٦) ثُمَّ لَتَرَوْهَا عَيْنَ الْيَقِينِ (٧) ثُمَّ
لَتُسْأَلُنَّ يَوْمَئِذٍ عَنِ النَّعِيمِ (٨)⁴

These verses unveil the real reason behind the carefree attitude of such people. It is attributed to their lack of belief in the Day of Judgement, a day in which they will observe the abyss of Hell from their very eyes. A day when they will be held answerable for all the favours and blessings the Almighty had showered upon them, and which they had squandered against His liking. If they had a true belief in the Day of Judgement, they would never have indulged in these material pursuits, and would have spent all their time and energies in preparing themselves for it.

It would be appropriate here to analyze the grammatical structure and construction of these verses. The apodosis (*jawāb*) of the hypothetical particle لَوْ is omitted here. Though almost all the commentators agree to this, but they do not consider the subsequent verses as subordinate to this conditional clause of the foremost verse. However, in my opinion the subsequent verses are also subordinate to the hypothetical particle لَوْ of the first verse, and they are not separate or independent sentences. The over all apodosis of لَوْ is omitted because the context readily suggests it. We can unfold the whole sentence as thus: "If you knew all these aspects, you would never have adopted this attitude." In grammatical terminology, the verse لَتَرَوُنَّ الْجَحِيمَ is in place of the object of the verse لَوْ تَعْلَمُونَ عِلْمَ الْيَقِينِ (if you knew with certainly that you would see the blazing fire of hell). The asseverative particle لَ, appended to the energetic verb لَتَرَوُنَّ is meant to emphasize this certainty.

It follows from this that the عِلْمُ الْيَقِينِ ('ilm al-yaqīn) or certain knowledge needed to have faith in the Day of Judgement is already present in the manifest verses of the Qur'ān, in our own intuition, as well as in every phenomenon of nature. As such, every person must accept and acclaim this reality. Anyone who evades it by paying no heed to these strong testimonies present inside and outside him, can have no excuse for this attitude, and strictly deserves to be punished.

Another evident conclusion is that though certain knowledge about realities which in this world have been concealed from our eyes can be obtained from the Qur'ān, and from the testimonies of the human instinct and the cosmic order, yet عَيْنُ الْيَقِينِ ('ayn al-yaqīn) or the certainty obtained by actually beholding a reality can only be possible in the

4. By no means! if you knew definitely that you would surely come across Hell, and you would observe it by your very eyes, and you would be questioned about these blessings, then...

Hereafter because this type of knowledge solely relates to the observation of the concealed realities. On these grounds, I consider as baseless, the claim of some people that عَيْنُ الْيَقِينِ ('ayn al-yaqīn) can be obtained in this world as well. Only عِلْمُ الْيَقِينِ ('ilm al-yaqīn) about a reality on the basis of external evidences can be obtained in this world, and which, of course, one day will be observed directly.

The last verse ثُمَّ لَتُسْأَلُنَّ يَوْمَئِذٍ عَنِ النَّعِيمِ also has a subordinate relation with the verse لَوْ تَعْلَمُونَ عِلْمَ الْيَقِينِ. A precise translation reads thus: if you knew that on that day you would be questioned about every favour and blessing. By this “questioning”, is actually meant that they would be punished for misusing these blessings, and for being ungrateful to the Almighty.

The word النَّعِيمِ encompasses all the skills and capabilities, as well as all means and resources God has blessed us with. All these privileges and favours necessitate that we should be grateful to God, and expend them in the way He has prescribed for us and within the limits set by Him. If these blessings are wasted or misused, then this negligence must necessarily be punished by the wrath of God. A person's eyes, ears, heart, brain, and indeed all his organs and limbs are a blessing of God. Similarly, all the latent and apparent skills and abilities that he has been blessed with, as well as all his means and resources are a gift of God. It is the natural right of these blessings that God should be thanked for this bestowal, and that they should be used within the limits prescribed by Him. At the same time, a person must not become so possessed with them that he actually starts worshipping them, forgetting the real Creator. Those who commit such excesses will be severely dealt with on the Day of Judgement.

Since in this *sūrah*, the evils of the acquisition of wealth are highlighted, wealth, which is one of the connotations of the word النَّعِيمِ is specially discussed here. Every person will be held accountable for the manner in which he had acquired his wealth, and the ways in which he had spent it. Those who had spent it against the liking of the Almighty, and did not care to acquire it by legitimate means, worshipping it by spending all their lives accumulating it will be confronted by the fate mentioned in Sūrah Humaza:

وَيْلٌ لِّكُلِّ هُمَزَةٍ لُّمَزَةٍ الَّذِي جَمَعَ مَالًا وَعَدَّدَهُ يَحْسَبُ أَنَّ مَالَهُ أَخْلَدَهُ كَلَّا لَيُنْبَذَنَّ فِي
الْخُطْمَةِ وَمَا أَذْرَاكَ مَا الْخُطْمَةُ نَارُ اللَّهِ الْمَوْقَدَةُ الَّتِي تَطْلُعُ عَلَى الْأَفْئِدَةِ إِنَّهَا عَلَيْهِمْ
مُؤَصَّدَةٌ (٨) فِي عَمَدٍ مُمَدَّدَةٍ (١٠٤: ١-٦)

Devastation to every slanderer, every person who makes evil gestures at others, and who amassed wealth and kept counting it, thinking that his wealth had rendered him immortal. By no means! He shall be flung into

that which crushes. And what do you imagine that which crushes is? A fire kindled by Allah; which will rise up to their hearts. Indeed, they will be enshrouded in it, fastened to columns very high. (104: 1-6)

At the end, the overall apodosis of the particle *لَوْ* is omitted, as has been indicated before. There are many places in the Qur'ān where this style is adopted because the omission is so obvious that it needs no words for its expression. This style very effectively conveys the intended meaning, which is in fact very comprehensive and whose expression might otherwise be against the norms of brevity, a distinctive feature of the Qur'ān.

In this case, the omitted part which is left to the imagination of the reader, is actually a final warning for these people. It is a means of urging them to calmly review all their hitherto policies. It cautions them to seriously analyze their attitude about some undeniable and inescapable realities of life. It exhorts them to deeply contemplate over the pattern of their lives and assess how far from reality they had always remained; how incorrect and unrealistic was their attitude about it. If they had earnestly thought about them, they would not have wasted their lives in oblivion. But then, all is not lost. They are being offered a final chance to mend their ways, and change their life styles. They should now confine all their efforts and undertakings to earn the eternal happiness of the Hereafter, instead of wasting them in material pursuits.

This whole meaning is being suggested by this omission – a perfect example of how effectively the Qur'ān uses brevity to conceal profound meanings in a minimum number of words.

Sūrah ‘Aşr

Central Theme, Relationship with Preceding Sūrah and Sequence in the Subject Matter

In Sūrah Takāthur, the previous *sūrah*, those people are warned who waste all their lives in planning to amass wealth until death stares them in their eyes and they do not even get the time to think of the higher objective for which the Almighty blessed them with life. Instead of trying to achieve this objective, they wasted their lives in going after petty goals and trivial desires. Had they known that one day like all other favours, they would have to give an account of the way they spent the great blessing of life also, they would never have been so foolish as to waste their lives in gathering meagre pleasures and becoming worthy of eternal condemnation. Had they exercised prudence, they would have realized that this life could have afforded them with an everlasting kingdom. Now, in this *sūrah*, the real value and importance of life is divulged. The factors which make it a surety for eternal salvation and the factors which make it responsible for eternal doom are explained. How a person can make it an embodiment of benevolence for himself and how it becomes, out of its own accord, a means of his scourge and punishment if he is not able to make it an embodiment of benevolence for himself is alluded to.

In order to make man understand this reality, an oath has been sworn by time as a means to testify to this reality: if a person reflects, he will come to know that the real investment he has in this world is a small span of time which is given to him in the form of a period of life. If he uses this time in the right manner, he can become a favourite of the Being Who blessed him with life and also attain the state whereby he becomes pleased with His Creator, and His Creator become pleased with Him. On the other hand, he can also earn the eternal punishment of Hell by misusing it. In other words, by nature, this time period is like a sword which can be used in both ways: if a person does not use it to his own advantage, it will automatically be used in favour of Satan, his eternal enemy. A very small portion of time – the present – is in his power and he can use it the way he wants to; of the rest, either it has become the past which can never return to him or the future which is hidden to him and no one knows its extent or whether it exists for him in the first place and if it

does what are the circumstances and the demands it affords. Whatever time comes, it comes with its certain demands and requisites. There is no possibility that a person defer his present obligation to the future.

After focusing man’s attention to this all important reality, the correct approach is pointed out which is adopted by those who correctly benefit from the time of life they are given and thereby earn eternal life in place of this fleeting one. Though this approach is pointed out in a few words, however such is the judiciousness and comprehensiveness of style adopted that if a person deliberates on it, he will come to know the individual and collective obligations which are imposed on him that he must discharge and that it is on discharging them that his eternal salvation depends.

A little deliberation shows that the real purpose of the Qur’ān is to guide man to this straight path and to organize the individual and collective life of a person in order to achieve success in the Hereafter. In other words, the message which is conveyed by one hundred and fourteen *sūrahs* of the Qur’ān has been succinctly put in three verses of this *sūrah*. It is to this very fact that Imām Shāfi‘ī has pointed by saying that if people only read Sūrah ‘Aṣr while reflecting on its contents, it will suffice for them.

Text and Translation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
وَالْعَصْرِ (١) إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لَفِي خُسْرٍ (٢) إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَتَوَاصَوْا
بِالْحَقِّ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ (٣)

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Ever Merciful.

Time bears witness that man is in a state of loss except those who embraced faith and did righteous deeds and urged one another to the truth and urged one another to patience. (1-3)

Explanation

وَالْعَصْرِ (١)¹

The particle و denotes “bearing witness” and عَصْر means “a period of time”. Here is a summary of what my mentor Ḥamīd al-Dīn Farāhī has written while presenting his research on this word in the exegesis of this *sūrah*:²

1.

2. Farāhī, *Majmū‘ah Tafāsīr*, 339.

عَصْر means “ a period of time”. Just as the word ذَهْر refers to the totality of time, the word عَصْر refers to its moving forward and swiftness. Consequently, its dominant use is on the time period which has passed. Imru’ al-Qays says:³

وهل ينعمن من كان في العصر الخالي

(And now it is good fortune for those who were in the time of the past.)

‘Ubayd ibn al-Abrāṣ says:⁴

فذاك عصر وقد أراني

يحملني بازل شوب

(And that was also a period of time when I used to see myself riding a young and beautiful she-camel.)

After presenting the meaning of this word in the light of classical Arabic, Imām Farāhī summarizes the discussion thus:⁵

It is evident [from this discussion] that the word عَصْر on the one hand reminds a person of the incidents and events of the past and on the other hand also directs his attention to their specific characteristic of swiftness and rapidity. A reference to both these facets brings two consequences before us. First, the judgement of God will be implemented on people according to their deeds. Second, we should benefit as much as we can from the passing time whose most prominent feature is its briskness and speed.

Now consider the question that why has time been sworn upon here? The answer to this question is that on the one hand the Almighty has directed our attention to the various events of history which took place

3. Ṣadr al-Dīn ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, *Diwān al-ḥmāsah al-Baṣriyyah*, vol. 1 (Beirut: ‘Ālim al-kitāb, 1403 AH), 48.

أبو زيد القرشي، دار النشر: دار الأرقم - بيروت

4. Abū Zayd al-Qarshī, *Jamhurah ash‘ār al-‘arab*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-arqam, n.d.), 141. This source cites the second hemistich as: تحملني نهدة سرحوب. (Translator)

5. Farāhī, *Majmū‘ah Tafāsīr*, 340.

on the basis of His law of reward and punishment and which have been mentioned in the Qur'ān and other divine scriptures and on the other hand people have been cautioned and prodded that they should not spend their lives in indifference and oblivion; they should diligently try to use it to their own advantage. It is in lieu of these fast moving moments of time that they can obtain an eternal kingdom if they really comprehend their true value. If they do not, then they should remember that they will become a means of eternal curse for them.

Imām Farāhī has explained this point in the following words in his exegesis:⁶

The judgement of God enforced on the previous nations [of the Prophets] was an exact recompense of their deeds. If they did virtuous deeds, the Almighty blessed them with ascendancy and if they took to oppression and spreading disorder, the law of God after giving them respite for a time in which the truth was made evident to them to the extent that they could not deny it, destroyed them. It is to remind people of this reality that an oath was sworn by time so that people remember that one day they will also have to face this law of retribution.

Moreover, there is another delicate point hidden in this oath: the real investment a person has is that of time and the primary feature of time is that nothing can outdo its briskness and speed. How naïve is a person who in spite of being aware of this disloyalty of time trusts it and becomes indifferent to the transience of this world and to the accountability of the Hereafter.

Imām Farāhī cites an example to explain this reality:⁷

In this matter, man is much like a merchant who trades in ice; however, instead of trying to sell it as soon as possible and gain some profit from this transaction, he stacks it in a place and merrily views its shine relishing the coldness it provides. It is obvious that very soon such a short-sighted merchant would end up lamenting his indifference.

In this regard, Imām Farāhī has directed our attention to another aspect:

6. Ibid., 341-342.

7. Ibid., 342.

Moreover, in the swiftness of time, there is an aspect which gives us glad tidings and strengthens our patience: in this short span of time, man, if he desires, can gather an everlasting treasure. An accursed person being lured by the transient pleasure of this mortal life deprives himself of eternal pleasure and success; however, a wise person, after bearing the trials of self-discipline and virtue of this finite life which is no more than a fleeting dream and a flash of lightning ... obtains the pleasure of God and the embellishment of His eternal love.

إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لِفِي خُسْرٍ (٢) إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَتَوَّصُوا بِالْحَقِّ وَتَوَّصُوا
بِالصَّبْرِ (٣)⁸

Stated here is the real premise to substantiate which an oath has been sworn by time. If, on the one hand, the value and importance of the life-span granted to a person is such that he can attain an eternal kingdom because of it and also end up eternally condemned if he shows indifference, and, on the other hand, such is the nature of its swiftness and speed that every moment is shortening it and man has no hold on this, then all people are in a state of loss – people whose real investment and capital is being rapidly consumed whilst they themselves are unaware of this happening. Thus this whole premise is stated in the form of a testimony and asserted that all people are in a state of loss except those who embraced faith and did good deeds.

It is evident from this discussion that the real value and significance of life is in faith and righteous deeds. The very purpose for which the Almighty has blessed man with life is that man, in defiance and in opposition to Satan, leads it in a manner prescribed by God; in reward for this, the Almighty will be pleased with him and he will be pleased with the Almighty and earn the ticket to eternal Paradise. Just as the reward for the eternal life of Paradise in return for a few days of trial is no ordinary a favour, ending up losing this favour whilst being led astray by the lures of Satan is no ordinary a deprivation.

The definition of *imān* has been mentioned at a number of places in this exegesis. In short, it can be stated as acknowledging God with full sincerity of heart whilst accepting all His attributes and their obvious corollaries. Imām Farāhī, whilst explaining the meaning of *imān* in his exegesis, has written:⁹

8. Man is in a state of loss except those who embraced faith and did righteous deeds and urged one another to the truth and urged one another to patience.

9. Ibid., 347.

The root of *imān* is *amn*. It is used in various shades of meaning. *وَأَمَّنَهُمْ مِنْ خَوْفٍ* (He gave him peace). The Qur'ān says: *وَأَمَّنَهُمْ مِنْ خَوْفٍ* (He provided them with peace in fear, (106:4)). *صَدَّقَهُ وَاعْتَمَدَ* (4:106) (He attested to it; He trusted it). *أَمَّنَ لَهُ عَلَيْهِ* (He had absolute faith in him).

This word has been used in the Qur'ān in all these shades. One of its derivatives is *مُؤْمِن* (*mu'min*), which is amongst the noble names of God because He gives peace to those who seek His refuge.

This word is also an ancient religious term. ... Hence the certitude which exists with humility, trust and all the conditions and corollaries of adherence to a view is called *imān* and he who professes faith in God, in His signs and in His directives and submits himself to Him and is pleased with all His decisions is a *mu'min*.

After faith (*imān*), the status of righteous deeds is that of its corollary. When true faith is engendered in a person, just as its radiance lights up his inner-self, it should also necessarily light up the deeds which emanate from him. If, accordingly, good deeds do not result from faith, it only means that faith has not taken firm roots in his heart. It is essential that there exist harmony and concord between faith and deeds. Imām Farāhī has explained this aspect in his *tafsīr* in the following manner:¹⁰

Righteous deeds are mentioned in the Qur'ān right after faith in the capacity of an explanation ... Similar is the case of the mention of obedience to the Prophet (sws) after a mention of obedience to God ... The need for this explanation arises because certain important aspects of certain words remain concealed. In the case of faith, the need for its explanation is obvious: the place of faith is the heart and the intellect. In matters of intellect and heart, not only can a person deceive others but also at times he himself can remain in deception. He considers himself to be a *mu'min* (believer) whereas actually he is not. For this reason, two testimonies needed to be required for it: a person's words and a person's deeds. Since words can be untrue, hence a person who only professes faith through words is not regarded as a *mu'min* and it was deemed essential that a person's deeds also testify to his faith.¹¹ Thus the Qur'ān said:

10. Ibid., 349.

11. It should remain in consideration that the faith under discussion is

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا آمِنُوا (١٣٦:٤)

O you who believe with the tongue! Believe through your deeds.
(4:136)

Whilst explaining the reason for regarding good deeds to be *ṣālihāt* (righteous), Imām Farāhī writes:¹²

God has regarded good deeds to be *ṣālihāt* (righteous). This word actually alludes to a great piece of wisdom: the means for the apparent and hidden, worldly and religious, individual and collective, corporeal and intellectual development and advancement of a person are righteous deeds. In other words, righteous deeds are deeds which are a means of providing life and progress to a person and through which a person can reach the highest rungs of development which are innately found in his nature.

Later, he has further explained this point thus:¹³

This point can be understood in other words from the fact that man is part of the overall machine of this universe. Thus only those of his deeds will be regarded as righteous (*ṣālih*) which are in harmony with the scheme and wisdom of God which He has adopted for this collective system. The Almighty has not made this world a play-place for children. There is a certain system of prudence which runs through this whole universe and it is the will of the Almighty that whatever happens in this universe should be in harmony with this system of prudence.

Consider next, the words: *وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالْحَقِّ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ*. What is mentioned in the previous part of the verse primarily relates to the personal life of a person; however, a person does not merely have a personal life: by his very nature, he has a gregarious temperament; he is always a part of a

actually its essence. Faith in its legal connotation is not what is discussed here. Those who want to understand faith in its legal sense should look up various places in this commentary where it has been alluded to. Imām Farāhī has referred to some of its important aspects in his commentary on Sūrah 'Aṣr and we have also attempted to explain some of its important features in this commentary.

12. Farāhī, *Majmū'ah Tafāsīr*, 2nd ed. (Lahore: Faran Foundation, 1998), 352.

13. Ibid., 353.

family and member of a society. If he has adopted some other life-style, it is not because of his natural temperament and instinct; on the contrary, it is because of some unnatural deviation. His relationship with family and society is natural. Just as he receives support from these in his material life, he receives guidance from them for his moral and spiritual development. It is because of this assistance provided by family and society that an obligation is imposed on him that he should not remain indifferent to their welfare and well-being. If he does, it would be against decency. It is the requirement of human nature that people who become aware of the straight path that leads to faith and righteous deeds should also urge others to tread this path and also urge each other to adhere to perseverance and patience. This is because without adhering to perseverance and patience it is neither easy to adopt the truth and remain steadfast on it nor is it easy to call people towards the truth.

It should be kept in consideration that it has not been said that they call people towards faith and righteous deeds; on the contrary, it is said that they urge each other to adopt *ḥaqq* and urge each other to show patience. This style has not only included in it what is found in the first part, it has also made very important additions to it: *imān* is included to the utmost in *al-ḥaqq* because it is the right of God and the greatest right of God. Similarly, righteous deeds either relate to the rights towards God or rights towards human beings; hence righteous deeds are also included in *ḥaqq*.

It is evident from this discussion that believers do all these things as an obligation, urge others to adopt them and also counsel others that discharging these obligations is no easy a task; it requires patience and forbearance. Those who do not have this characteristic will find it very difficult to carry out these obligations.

The word *ḥaqq* has been explained by Imām Farāhī in his exegesis in the following words:¹⁴

The word *ḥaqq* is used primarily for what exists and continues to exist. However, it has different usages. Its usage in at least three meanings is very common and conventional in Arabic:

- i. something which is certain
- ii. something which is acknowledged to be true by intellect.
- iii. something which is a moral obligation

14. Ibid., 354.

After citing various arguments from the Qur'ān in favour of these three meanings, Imām Farāhī writes:¹⁵

As far as its special meaning ie showing sympathy to the weak and poor is concerned, it has sprung from its general meaning. It is as if this is the greatest *ḥaqq* to the people of Arabia which is incumbent upon every person who has the capacity to do it. It should be the right of every needy person ...For this very reason *iḥsān* is regarded to be a *ma'rūf*, which means something which is recognized and acknowledged by every person and has the status of an accepted law before all reasonable people. It is evident from this discussion that if the word *ḥaqq* is taken to mean "sympathy with the poor", it will reflect all the meanings of the word mentioned above.

Whilst presenting his research on the word *ṣabr*, Imām Farāhī writes:¹⁶

However, one should realize that to the Arabs patience is not something of the sort of weakness and frailty which is the characteristic of the helpless and the feeble; in fact, to them it is the foundation of tenacity and resolve. This word has been amply used in classical Arabic poetry and in all these usages, it corroborates this view of the Arabs. Ḥātim Ṭā'ī says:¹⁷

و غمرة موت ليس فيها هواده
يكون الصدور المشرفي جسورها

صبرنا له في نهكها ومصابها
بأسيافنا حتى يبوخ سعيها

(Against many horrible seas of death and life over which there were bridges of swords, we showed perseverance with our swords against all their calamities until their heat went away.)

After citing the couplets of some famous classical poets, Imām Farāhī has explained the meaning of *ṣabr* through the Qur'ān itself in the

15. Ibid., 354-355.

16. Ibid., 345.

17. Ḥātim Ṭā'ī, *Diwān*, vol. 1, 39. The source actually cites صبرنا له as صبرنا لها. (Translator)

following words:¹⁸

The Qur'ān itself has revealed the real meaning of *ṣabr*:

وَالصَّابِرِينَ فِي الْبَأْسَاءِ وَالضَّرَّاءِ وَحِينَ الْبَأْسِ (٢: ١٧٧)

And who are patient in adversity, illness and in times of war (2:177)

This verse mentions three situations to display *ṣabr*: adversity, illness and war. A little deliberation would show that these three are the fountainheads of hardships and difficulties. If a person remains steadfast in them, then he is a person blessed with the quality of patience.

Whilst further explaining the mutual relationship between *ḥaqq* and *ṣabr*, Imām Farāhī writes:¹⁹

A summary of all these details is that *ḥaqq* opens the door to all virtues and *ṣabr* closes the door to all evils. In other words, it can be said that *ḥaqq* is what is really wanted and fondly desired and *ṣabr* is the enthusiasm and passion to achieve it.

It is not concealed from the eyes of the discerning that the real thing is steadfastness once a virtue is attained. One should now reflect how aptly and comprehensively all virtues and good deeds are combined in the two words of *ḥaqq* and *ṣabr* and how deep and vast is the relationship between the two.

.....
Here, in fact, many branches sprout from a root. *Imān* is like a foundation and a nucleus. Righteous deeds are mentioned after it as its explanation. Since *ḥaqq* is cherished and liked by both the mind and the heart and on it depends perfection and excellence of both, *ṣabr* is mentioned as a consequence for its love. To love and cherish something requires that a person possess the qualities of perseverance and steadfastness for it. It is very obvious that this perseverance and steadfastness is as per the status of what is loved and cherished. The more love and cherished a thing is, the more the enthusiasm and vigour for it would boil in person. The manifestation of the feelings of defence, anger and sense of honour is not the same

18. Farāhī, *Majmū'ah tafāsīr*, 346.

19. Ibid., 355-356.

for all things; it varies: the more a thing is liked and loved, the more do the feelings of respect and honour arise for it.

The reason for the Almighty's anger and fury is also because He holds *ḥaqq* dear; so those who damage it in anyway invite His rage and wrath. Can a person silently bear the insult of something which is dear to him? His sense of honour will definitely incite him to defend it. A mother loves her child and one knows that this love is not mere love; it also possesses a frenzied sense of honour and when the time comes this honour even sacrifices a mother in defense of her child. It is this sense of honour and protection which is found in nations for their rights and demands. So much so, a feeble dove also has such intense feelings of love and honour for her eggs and offspring that if someone tries to snatch them, she will always try to ward him off through her frail feathers. It is evident from this discussion that *ṣabr* in fact originates from one's love for *ḥaqq*.

Let us now see what the relationship of "faith and righteous deeds" and "urging one another towards *ḥaqq* and *ṣabr*". Imām Farāhī writes in this regard:²⁰

It is evident from the last part of this third verse: *وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالْحَقِّ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ* that these people have in them the qualities of *ḥaqq* and *ṣabr* and besides practically adhering to them, they also call others towards them. This aspect is found in between the lines and has not been expressed in words. The reason for this is that it firstly was already found in the words *آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ* and secondly the lack of efficacy of a person who does not practice what he preaches is so obvious that at this instance in the verse where believers are praised for their qualities one cannot even imagine that they would urge others' to something which they themselves do not practically adhere to.

It is evident from this discussion that just as righteous deeds have sprung from faith, mutual exhortation towards *ḥaqq* and *ṣabr* have sprung from righteous deeds. A person who cherishes and likes *ḥaqq* would always be ready to bear difficulties and hardships for its protection. It is essential that for it, his knowledge, love and sense of honour increase. He would not want that merely he himself love *ḥaqq*; he would also want the whole world to have the same feelings

20. Ibid., 357.

for it and wherever he sees *ḥaqq* in subservience and facing oppression and evil in a dominant position, he would become anxious and like a person having dignity and determination would motivate others to defend and protect *ḥaqq*. Motivating and inspiring others for this purpose is a natural corollary and part of the sense of dignity and honour for *ḥaqq* found within himself. Thus, here the Almighty has mentioned urging others towards *ḥaqq* and *ṣabr* as actually a part and an explanation of righteous deeds.

With the grace of God, with these line the explanation of the *sūrah* comes to an end. فالحمد لله أولاً وآخراً (All gratitude, from the beginning to the end, is for God).

Lahore,
24th April, 1980 AD
9th Jamādī al-Thānī, 1400 AH

(Translated from *Tadabbur-i Qur'ān* by Shehzad Saleem)

Sūrah Humazah

Central Theme

This *sūrah* is the counterpart of Sūrah ‘Aṣr, the previous *sūrah*. Even a cursory look at both the *sūrahs* reveals a clear similarity in their themes. In the previous *sūrah*, the character of persons who will be salvaged in the Hereafter is depicted. They are those who exhort one other to the right path and remain steadfast on this attitude. In this *sūrah*, people of the opposite character are referred to: They are miserly by nature and greedily accumulate wealth. Instead of urging one another to fulfil the rights of Allah and their own fellow beings, if they see someone doing so, they make his life miserable by hurling taunts and jeers at him. They try their utmost to discourage and demoralize him so much that he may surrender to their reproaches and adopt their evil ways. This attitude conceals their own miserliness and saves them from being conscience-stricken when others call them to the right path.

The Qur’ān, at many instances has made references to this miserly character of people who greedily hoard money. To quote Sūrah Tawbah:

الَّذِينَ يَلْمِزُونَ الْمُطَّوِّعِينَ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ فِي الصَّدَقَاتِ وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَجِدُونَ إِلَّا جُهْدَهُمْ
فَيَسْخَرُونَ مِنْهُمْ سَخِرَ اللَّهُ مِنْهُمْ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ (٧٩:٩)

Those who censure the believers who give freely and who scoff at the poor that give according to their means, Allah will scoff at them, and theirs shall be a torment afflictive.(9:79)

While explaining the above verse, this writer has written:¹

The words مُطَّوِّعٌ and مُتَطَوِّعٌ are the same words. مُطَّوِّعٌ is a person who not only fulfils his obligations but also enjoys doing what is optional and over and above them with great enthusiasm and fervour.

لَمَزٌ means “to censure, to slander, to speak ill of”.

In the above quoted verses, it is stated that the Hypocrites do not

1. Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāhī, *Tadabbur-i-Qur’ān*, vol. 3, 202-203.

spend in the cause of Allah and also cannot bear to see others doing so. Whenever they see someone spending in such a cause, they start reproaching and ridiculing him. When they see the affluent among the Muslims spending generously and sincerely, they regard it a pretentious display put up to bluff others and to give others a false impression of piety. If they see the poor, who have barely saved something to spend in this cause, they scorn and sneer at them to discourage them.

It is the psychology of misers to try to induce others to miserliness in order to hide their own, just as a person with an ugly nose wishes others to be like him so that no one remains to call him ugly. The hypocrites also would satisfy their emotions of rivalry with Islam by doing the same. They did not want to spend a penny for its cause nor did they want others to do so. They could not bear people spending generously on the poor. So, when they would see an ordinary labourer happily giving whatever dates he had saved, sacrificing the needs of his wife and children and buying the wealth of the two worlds in their place, they writhed and twisted with venom and satisfied their anger by scorning and taunting them.

This character of the misers actually portrays their helplessness. Neither do they have the courage and spirit to outdo others in fulfilling the rights of their fellow beings nor can they stop others who call upon them to do so. The only course left for them to defend themselves is to gibe and mock at those who are actually exposing their weaknesses. Because they were trying to conceal their inner self, the *sūrah* has brought to light every aspect of both their inner and outer selves.

It should be clear that though in this *sūrah* the character of the stingy is actually depicted, yet the character of those having other moral weaknesses is no different. They also try to defend themselves by making fun of those having high moral character. The people of Lot (sws) too had adopted a similar attitude. When they observed that it was becoming difficult for them to counter the reformatory movement launched by the Prophet Lot (sws) and his companions, they, instead of mending their ways, started scoffing and leering at the Prophet Lot (sws) and his companions by saying: *إِنَّهُمْ أَنَاسٌ يَتَطَهَّرُونَ* (these people pretend to be noble, (27:56)). They even started exhorting their nation to banish “these nobles” from the country, lest they disgrace the whole nation.

Text and Translation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
 وَيُلْ لِّكُلِّ هُمَزَةٍ لُّمَزَةٍ (١) الَّذِي جَمَعَ مَالًا وَعَدَّدَهُ (٢) يَحْسَبُ أَنَّ مَالَهُ أَخْلَدَهُ (٣) كَلَّا
 لَيُنْبَذَنَّ فِي الْحُطَمَةِ (٤) وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا الْحُطَمَةُ (٥) نَارُ اللَّهِ الْمَوْقَدَةُ (٦) الَّتِي تَطَّلِعُ عَلَى
 الْأَفْئِدَةِ (٧) إِنَّهَا عَلَيْهِمْ مُّصَدَّةٌ (٨) فِي عَمَدٍ مُمَدَّدَةٍ (٩)

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Ever Merciful.

Devastation to every person who makes evil gestures at others and to every slanderer who amassed wealth and kept counting it. It is as if his wealth had rendered him immortal. (1-3)

By no means! He shall be flung into that which crushes. And what do you imagine that which crushes is? A fire kindled by Allah; which will rise up to their hearts. They will be enshrouded in it, fastened to columns very high. (4-9)

Explanation of the Sūrah

وَيُلْ لِّكُلِّ هُمَزَةٍ لُّمَزَةٍ²(١)

The word هُمَزٌ means “to make evil gestures at others”, and لُمَزٌ means “to malign and slander someone”. هُمَزَةٌ and لُمَزَةٌ are intensive forms, as is حُطَمَةٌ mentioned later in the sūrah. هُمَزَةٌ means “someone who makes evil gestures at others”, while لُمَزَةٌ means “one who finds faults in others”. Making evil gestures and slandering others are the two aspects of the same character. The first relates to behavioural expressions, and the second one pertains to verbal expressions. Both are employed to degrade and ridicule others. At times, the first can prove the sharper of the two, and perhaps this is the reason for placing هُمَزَةٌ before لُمَزَةٌ.

In every civilised society, هُمَزٌ and لُمَزٌ are always considered to be mean habits. All divine religions forbid them. The Qur’ān also clearly prohibits a person to do so:

وَلَا تَلْمِزُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَلَا تَنَابَزُوا بِالْأَلْقَابِ (١١:٤٩)

And do not defame one another nor revile each other by evil names. (49:11).

This “art” was patronized and promoted not only in ancient uncultured

2. Devastation to every person who makes evil gestures at others and to every slanderer.

societies but is also in vogue in the “modern” uncultured societies. Today, humorous columns and cartoons published in newspapers and magazines do the job which was done by the mimics, imitators and jesters of yester years. In Sūrah Qalam, a comprehensive analysis of the leaders of Quraysh as well as their cohorts is made. It shows that they also wanted to thwart the attempts of the Muslims in spreading the Islamic Message by adopting tactics similar to those employed by the professional leaders of today to get the better of their opponents. The Prophet (sws), therefore, was advised to remain aware of this foul play in the following words by the Qur’ān:

وَلَا تُطِيعْ كُلَّ حَلَّافٍ مَّهِينٍ هَمَّازٍ مَّشَاءٍ بَنِيمٍ مَنَاجٍ لِلْخَيْرِ مُعْتَدٍ أَثِيمٍ عُتُلٌّ بَعْدَ
ذَلِكَ زَنِيمٍ أَنْ كَانَ ذَا مَالٍ وَبَنِينَ (٦٨: ١٠-١٤)

Pay no heed to any ignominious oath-monger, who makes evil gestures and who sows seeds of dissension, forbiddener of good, transgressor and usurper of rights, cruel and moreover a flatterer -- only because he has been blessed with wealth and children. (68:10-14)

الَّذِي جَمَعَ مَالًا وَعَدَّدَهُ³ (٢)

The verse vividly portrays the life of stingy people. On the one hand, they do all what they can to silence those who call upon them to fulfil the rights of Allah and their own fellow beings, and on the other are busy amassing riches and greedily hoarding them. They remain deeply engrossed in computing and calculating their wealth. Speculating about the prospects of success in business is their only food for thought. Issues like the profit that can be obtained from various business undertakings, the money they can gain from their investments, the measures needed to compensate the loss in a particular economic enterprise and the grand total of their money next year possess their minds. If someone mentions before them that a person has spent his money on orphans and poor, they make fun of him by saying that he is only showing off his wealth and assert: “Look at us, we have spent thousands and no one has the slightest knowledge of it.”

يَحْسَبُ أَنَّ مَالَهُ أَخْلَدَهُ⁴ (٣)

This verse highlights the inner character of the hypocrites. They reckon

3. Who greedily amassed wealth and kept counting it.

4. It is as if his wealth has rendered him immortal.

that their wealth will also buy for them eternal life. Their complete involvement with wealth shows that they seek all pleasures of life in wealth. If they knew that both their wealth and life were ephemeral, they would have expended them in a way which would be profitable for them in the Hereafter. In fact, they would have tried to outdo one another in this dash.

In Sūrah Shu‘arā, this mentality is depicted in the following words:

أَتَبْنُونَ بِكُلِّ رِيعٍ آيَةً تَعْبَثُونَ وَتَتَّخِذُونَ مَصَانِعَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَخْلُدُونَ (١٢٨-١٢٩)

Will you build monuments of no use on every high place and build grand palaces as if you have to live here forever? (26:128-29)

It is a person's attitude towards life and not what he says which gives an indication of his inner self. The life of a person who considers this world as his final destination is totally different from that of a person for whom the next world is the ultimate destination, towards which this life leads. It is not possible that a person who believes in the Hereafter greedily hoard his wealth. Such a person, as the Prophet Jesus (sws) said, keeps his account with Allah:

Keep your wealth with Allah, because your heart is wherever your wealth is. (Matt, 6:21-22)

كَلَّا لَيُنْبَذَنَّ فِي الْحُطَمَةِ (٤)⁵

The word كَلَّا (By no means) is meant to negate the false notion of a miser stated in the previous verse: "thinking that his wealth has rendered him immortal". The Qur'ān says that such a person and whatever he has gathered will be hurled into the raging fire of Hell which shall crush them to pieces.

The word حُطَمَةٌ is from the root HTM which means "to crush to pieces". Like لُمَزَةٌ and هُمَزَةٌ, it is also an intensive form.

and are intensive forms, as is

وَمَا أَذْرَاكَ مَا الْحُطَمَةُ (٥)⁶

The question in this verse is meant to express the dreadfulness of Hell; a fire kindled by the Almighty should not be considered something ordinary. حُطَمَةٌ (that which crushes to pieces) seems a very apt word to depict the

5. By no means! He shall be flung into that which crushes.

6. And what do you imagine that which crushes to pieces is?

total annihilation of wealth amassed in the form of bricks of gold and silver, jewellery, and valuable utensils. This is precisely how the rich of that period used to accumulate their wealth. All such people will see this fate of their wealth, which they reckoned would render them immortal.

نَارُ اللَّهِ الْمُوقَدَةُ (٦) الَّتِي تَطَّلِعُ عَلَى الْأَفْئِدَةِ (٧)⁷

This verse explains the word حُطْمَةٌ stated in the previous one. The characteristic of this fire is that it will first of all seek those hearts that had remained so possessed by the love of wealth that the remembrance of Allah and the Final Day could find no space in them. We all know of certain devices which have been invented to track down specific targets. As soon as they sense their prey, they automatically follow and destroy it. The fire of Allah mentioned in this verse, it seems, will behave similarly and will grip all those hearts which were absorbed with the love of wealth and had remained indifferent to the needs of the poor.

إِنَّهَا عَلَيْهِمْ مُّوَصَّدَةٌ (٨)⁸

The fire shall completely engulf them so that no part of its heat is wasted. The phrase أَوْصَدَ الْبَابَ means “he closed the door”. The fire will close over them as in a brick kiln, destroying them with all its force.

فِي عَمَدٍ مُمَدَّدَةٍ (٩)⁹

This verse depicts the helplessness of these criminals. Even within the fire they will be fastened to high columns with heavy chains. Here only columns are mentioned; Sūrah Hāqqah mentions the chaining of such criminals as well:

خُذُوهُ فَعَلُّوه ثُمَّ الْجُجِيمَ صَلُّوه ثُمَّ فِي سِلْسِلَةٍ ذَرْعُهَا سَبْعُونَ ذِرَاعًا فَاسْلُكُوهُ إِنَّهُ
كَانَ لَا يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ الْعَظِيمِ وَلَا يَحْضُ عَلَى طَعَامِ الْمِسْكِينِ (٦٩: ٣٠-٣٤)

Seize him, and chain him with an iron collar and cast him into Hell, and then fasten him with a chain seventy cubits long. Indeed, he did not believe in Allah, most High nor did he urge others to feed the poor. (69:30-34)

7. A fire kindled by Allah, which will rise up to their hearts.

8. They shall be enshrouded in it.

9. Fastened to columns very high.

Sūrah Fīl

Central Theme, Relationship with Preceding and Succeeding *Sūrahs* and Sequence of the Discourse:

From *Sūrahs Qāri'ah* (no. 101) to *Humaza* (no. 104), it is pointed to the Quraysh that they have remained so possessed with the love of wealth and children that they have grossly failed to fulfil the rights of Allah as well as their own fellow beings. In spite of this, they still claim to be the heirs of Abraham (sws) and Ishmael (sws) and the custodians of the Baytullāh built by them. In this particular *sūrah* and its dual counterpart, *Sūrah Quraysh*, which succeeds it, they are cautioned that they have been blessed with peace and sustenance not because of their own efforts or because they were entitled to them, but because of the Prophet Abraham's invocation and the blessings of the House which he built. Therefore, instead of showing vanity, it is their obligation to worship the Lord of this House, who fed them in hunger and secured them against every kind of danger, as is indicated in *Sūrah Quraysh*: فَلْيَعْبُدُوا رَبَّ هَذَا الْبَيْتِ الَّذِي أَطْعَمَهُمْ مِّنْ جُوعٍ وَأَمَّنَّهُمْ مِّنْ خَوْفٍ (١٠٦: ٣-٤) (Hence, they should worship the Lord of the House, who fed them in hunger and provided them with peace in fear, (106:3-4)).

The only difference between the two *sūrahs* is that in *Sūrah Fīl* an event bears witness to the Power and Might of Allah which saved the Baytullāh from a great enemy, while in *Sūrah Quraysh*, the Quraysh are reminded of the fact that it is their association with the Baytullāh which accounts for the favours of peace and sustenance.

At the time when Abraham (sws) had settled his son Ishmael (sws) in Makkah, the land was not only scarce in food resources but was in a constant state of strife as well. Abraham (sws) had earnestly prayed to the Almighty to bless the land with peace and sustenance and the Almighty had granted him his wish. The progeny of Abraham benefited from both these favours because of Baytullāh only, but later on pride and vanity made them indifferent to these blessings. They are warned against their ingratitude at many instances (as in this *sūrah*) in the *Qur'ān*. In the *sūrahs* of this last group, *Sūrah Balad* also discusses some important aspects of this attitude and can be consulted for details.

In this *sūrah*, the Quraysh are reminded of a significant event of their history. The Almighty had helped them decidedly in combating the

forces of Abrahah who attacked the Baytullāh with a sixty thousand strong army to demolish it. It was not easy for the Quraysh to face such a big army in the open whose vane guard consisted of elephants. They had therefore sought refuge in the nearby mountains, and had defended the holy land by hurling stones at the advancing enemy. This defence was indeed very frail and feeble, but the Almighty transformed it into a powerful outburst which totally destroyed the enemy, and their dead bodies were feasted upon by kites, vultures and crows.

Text and Translation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

أَلَمْ تَرَ كَيْفَ فَعَلَ رَبُّكَ بِأَصْحَابِ الْفِيلِ (١) أَلَمْ يَجْعَلْ كَيْدَهُمْ فِي تَضْلِيلٍ (٢) وَأَرْسَلَ عَلَيْهِمْ طَيْرًا أَبَابِيلَ (٣) تَرْمِيهِمْ بِحِجَارَةٍ مِّن سِجِّيلٍ (٤) فَجَعَلَهُمْ كَعَصْفٍ مَّأْكُولٍ (٥)

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Ever Merciful.

Have you not seen how your Lord dealt with the people of the elephant? Did He not foil their treacherous plan? And sent down against them swarms of birds? (1-3)

You pelted them with clay stones. And God made them like straw eaten away. (4-5)

Explanation

أَلَمْ تَرَ كَيْفَ فَعَلَ رَبُّكَ بِأَصْحَابِ الْفِيلِ (١)¹

The addressed words *أَلَمْ تَرَ* (Have you not seen?) are grammatically singular in nature but they are mostly used in the Qur'ān to address plural entities, as if directed to every person individually in a group of people. Here the addressees are the Quraysh. They are reminded about their recent past and asked whether they had forgotten how their Lord had dealt with the People of the Elephant. It should be kept in mind that the event which is being referred to had taken place the same year the Prophet (sws) was born. Therefore, there must have been people at the time of revelation of this *sūrah* who had witnessed it or had at least heard so much about it by so many people that it had become for them no less than a directly observed reality. The words *أَلَمْ تَرَ*, therefore, seem very appropriate.

The Qur'ān has not mentioned any details regarding the People of the Elephant, such as their description, their origin and the purpose of their

1. Have you not seen how your Lord dealt with the People of the Elephant?

march. The reason for this brevity is that the addressed people knew these details very well. Only their introduction by the words أَصْحَابُ الْفِيلِ (People of the Elephant) was enough to indicate that Abrahah, the Abyssinian ruler of Yemen, whose troops also consisted of elephants was being referred to. It was the first time that the Arabs had encountered elephants in a war and to express the grimness of the event they remembered it by this name.

Whether there was only a single elephant or several, is a question in relation to which both meanings can be construed from the words of the Qur'ān. But since the word أَصْحَابُ (plural) is used and not صَاحِب, which is a singular word, it is more likely that there was more than one elephant. The Aḥādīth also reinforce the fact that there was a whole battery of elephants with the army, which tremendously increased its strength and awesomeness.

Though some historians have regarded Abrahah as a tolerant ruler, yet he does not deserve such a high opinion if his life is studied. He seems to be an opportunist, a traitor and highly prejudiced Christian. He had betrayed the ruler of Abyssinia and had actually used his army to bring Yemen under his own control. History bears witness to his traitorship: it is not possible to enlist all the details, yet it is a historical fact that after assuming control of Yemen, he not only killed its Jewish king but also ruthlessly exterminated Judaism from the land.

His prejudice for Christianity made him obsessed with the idea of converting the Arabs to Christianity. To execute his scheme, he built a grand cathedral in Ṣan'ā, the capital of Yemen. He wrote to king Negus of Abyssinia, for whom he was deputising in ruling Yemen, that he had built a unique cathedral towards which he intended to divert the Arabs to offer their pilgrimage and to demolish the Baytullāh. He then made up a story that an Arab had violated the sanctity of the cathedral by relieving himself in it, only to justify an attack on the Baytullāh. Considering the traditional bravery and courage of the Arabs it is very unlikely that something like this might have happened. Even if the episode is assumed to be true, a person's individual misdeed is not enough to justify the exaction of revenge from a whole nation and to go as far as razing down the Baytullāh. It is quite evident that only to inflame the Arabs and to gain the support of king Negus that this lie was given a lot of air. He finally launched an attack on Makkah with a sixty thousand army supported by nine or ten elephants.

أَلَمْ يَجْعَلْ كَيْدَهُمْ فِي تَضْلِيلٍ²

The Almighty aborted the scheme of Abrahah which has been termed كَيْدٌ (an intrigue) by the Qur'ān because to justify a vicious move a ridiculous allegation was invented, as is indicated before. However, there are also some other reasons for calling this scheme an intrigue. Imam Farāhī mentions them in his exegesis:³

1. He (Abrahah) had attacked the Baytullāh during the forbidden months because he believed that in these months the Arabs refrained from war and bloodshed.
2. He had tried to enter Makkah when its inhabitants and other Arabs were performing the rites of ḥajj.
3. He had specially intended to launch his offensive during the stay of Minā when the Arabs would either be busy in offering sacrifice or would be returning home totally exhausted.

To foil this evil contrivance, what the Almighty did is deduced thus by Imam Farāhī:⁴

1. He did not let them penetrate beyond the valley of Muḥassar.
2. The Arabs used the stones of this valley to bombard their enemy, as shall be described later.
3. He let loose a ḥāṣib (a stone hurling wind) on the enemy, which totally destroyed them.

Many eye witnesses have reported this ḥāṣib and historians like Ibn Hishām have recorded their observations. Imam Farāhī has also discussed these testimonies in detail. I shall restrict myself to two examples only. The famous poet Abū Qays while mentioning the power and glory of the Almighty refers to this ḥāṣib in the following way:⁵

2. Did He not foil their treacherous plan.

3. Farāhī, *Majmū'ah-i tafāsīr*, 386.

4. Ibid., 387.

5. Abū al-Walīd Muḥammad ibn 'Abdullāh ibn Aḥmad al-Azraqī, *Akhbār Makkah wa mā jā'a fihā min al-āthār*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Andulus li al-nashr, 1996), 156. This source cites the first hemistich as: فَأَرْسَلَ مِنْ فَوْقِهِمْ حَاصِبًا.
(Translator)

فَأَرْسَلَ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ حَاصِبَ
يَلْفَهُمْ مِثْلَ لَفِ الْقَرَمِ

(Then the Almighty unleashed a *ḥāṣib* on them which enwrapped them like rubbish.)

Similarly Ṣayfī ibn ‘Āmir has referred to a *ḥāṣib* and a *ṣayf* (This is also similar to a *ḥāṣib*, differing only in intensity):⁶

فَلَمَّا أَجَازُوا بَطْنَ نَعْمَانَ رَدَّهُمْ
جُنُودَ اللَّهِ بَيْنَ سَافٍ وَ حَاصِبٍ

(As soon as they advanced beyond Batni Nu‘mān, the forces of the Almighty alighted among the *ḥāṣib* and *ṣayf* and destroyed them)

وَأَرْسَلَ عَلَيْهِمْ طَيْرًا أَبَابِيلَ (٣)⁷

This is a metaphorical description of the final state of devastation and helplessness of Abrahah’s army. The Almighty totally ravaged them and not a single sole survived to gather the dead; They remained scattered in the battlefield. The Almighty sent forth on them carnivorous birds, which tore and ate their flesh and cleansed Makkah from the stink of their remains. “Sending forth birds on the enemies”, is a commonly found metaphorical depiction of the state of utter decimation of the enemy in the odes and laudatory compositions of the Arab poets. They often extol their armies by saying that when they attack the enemy, meat eating birds fly with them as if they knew that after the enemy is completely destroyed they would get a chance to satisfy their hunger. In the old Testament, the tale of Dā‘ūd (David) and Jālūt (Goliath) is narrated. It says that when the two faced each other in combat and David effectively answered all the conceited remarks of Goliath, Goliath, replied irritably: ‘I shall feed the kites and crows with your meat today’. But David by the Almighty’s help turned the tables on Goliath.

The word أَبَابِيل does not mean the swallows (the birds called أَبَابِيل). It means a pack of horses and also implies a swarm of birds. Grammarians differ whether the word is singular or plural. Some say that it is a plural

6. Abū ‘Uthmān ‘Amr ibn Bah#r al-Jāhiz, *Al-Hayawān*, vol. 7 (Beirut: Dār al-jīl, 1996), 197.

7. And sent down against them swarms of birds?

word which has no singular, and some hold that it is the plural of *إِبَالَةٌ*. In the opinion of this writer, it is used here for the birds who had gathered to feed on the slain army of Abrahah.

وَأَرْسَلَ عَلَيْهِمْ refers to the utter state of helplessness of the People of the Elephant that no one even remained to bury the dead: the birds feasted on the dead bodies with complete freedom.

تَرْمِيهِمْ بِحِجَارَةٍ مِّن سِجِّيلٍ (٤) فَجَعَلَهُمْ كَعَصْفٍ مَّا كُولٍ (٥)⁸

In the end, it is indicated how the Almighty's help had aided the believers in destroying their foes. The Quraysh are addressed and told that while they were hurling stones on the enemy, the Almighty transformed this weak defence into a strong one and it became so effective that it virtually made their enemies like straw devoured away.

Our commentators generally maintain that the Quraysh did not face the attacking enemy and their leader 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib took them away to seek refuge in the nearby mountains. They left the Baytullāh in the custody of the Almighty, believing that He who is the Lord of the House shall Himself protect it. In their consideration, the subject (*fā'il*) of the verb *تَرْمِي* is *طَيْرًا أَبَابِيلَ*, ie the birds had destroyed Abrahah's army by flinging stones on them. There is a general consensus on this view, but owing to various reasons it seems absolutely incorrect. Some of them are:

(1) There is no doubt that the Quraysh had gone off in the mountains but this does not imply at all that they had completely withdrawn themselves from its defence. They had adopted a special war strategy owing to their own weak position. Instead of facing a huge army in an open battle field, they took refuge in the mountains and tried to impede the enemy attack by adopting the tactics of guerrilla warfare. A similar strategy was adopted by the Muslims in the battle of Aḥzāb (trench) when they defended the Holy land of Madīnah by digging a trench around it.

It would have been disastrous for them to engage the enemy in open warfare, for even if they had tried their best, they could not have raised an army beyond twenty thousand, which was totally insufficient to fight a sixty thousand strong army aided with a battery of elephants. The Almighty helped them according to His principle that when a believer does his utmost in discharging his duty, he is aided by Divine Help.

(2) The claim that the Quraysh offered no resistance is not only against historical facts, but also against the sense of honour and pride of the Quraysh. All historians agree that whichever routes the army of Abrahah

8. You pelted them with stones of clay. And Allah made them like straw eaten away.

traversed, the respective Arab tribe did not let them through without offering some opposition. They tolerated the humiliation of defeat than letting the enemy through easily with such an evil motive. The only exception were the Banū Thaqīf, who did not display the sense of honour shown by all the other tribes. Abū Righāl a tribesman of the Banū Thaqīf revealed to the advancing army the way to Makkah. As a result, of being dishonourable, the Banū Thaqīf were completely disgraced in the eyes of the Arabs and lost their respect. Abū Righāl met an equally dreadful fate: for a number of years, the Arabs pelted stones at his grave. It should be realised that when small tribes fought so gallantly, how could have the Quraysh acted in such a dishonourable way by letting the opponents achieve their goal unchecked? If they did what is generally maintained, why was only Abū Righāl condemned for a similar crime? The Quraysh have always been famous for their sense of honour, as has been mentioned before. Even in trivial affairs they had never shown any weakness which could stain their honour; how could they disgrace and dishonour themselves in an affair upon which depended their religious as well as their political supremacy? After loosing the Baytullāh, what else did they have to live for? This view, therefore, cannot be accepted.

(3) Those who hold this view – and actually disparage the Quraysh by doing so – maintain that the *sūrah* conveys somewhat the following message: ‘The Almighty Himself is the Guardian of His House. Even if its custodians run away He Himself shall protect it. So when the Quraysh retreated to the mountains, the Almighty employed the أَبَابِيلَ to defend His House. The أَبَابِيلَ destroyed the enemy by hurling stones at them.’ If this is the lesson the *sūrah* conveys, then it is totally against the laws of the Almighty. It is against His principle that His people should sit in their houses, whilst He alone should win the battle for them. If this were true, then why were the Children of Israel punished for a similar attitude when they were left to wander for forty years in a desert. They had only said: (٢٤:٥) فَادْهَبْ أَنْتَ وَرَبُّكَ فَقَاتِلَا إِنَّا هَاهُنَا قَاعِدُونَ (go there, you [O Moses!] and your Lord, we will sit here, (5:42)).

According to the law of the Almighty which is clear from the Qur’ān, He helps only those who set out to fulfil their obligations, however small in number they may be and however limited their resources may be. Consequently, the responsibilities the Qur’ān has imposed on us Muslims in Sūrahs Baqarah, Tawbah and Hajj as regards the protection and liberation of Baytullāh are that we should first do all we can and then the Almighty will help us. It is not that He will send his help if we do not strive our utmost. The Quraysh procured the Almighty’s help because they did all they could. The Almighty reinforced their weak defence by

unleashing on the enemy a raging stone hurling wind which reduced them to nothingness. In the battle of Badr too, the Almighty lent His invisible hand of help when circumstances were no different as far as the defence of the Muslim army was concerned. The Almighty had transformed a handful of dust thrown at the enemy by the Prophet (sws) into a storm. The Almighty Himself explained the nature of this event in the Qur'ān: (١٧:٨) وَمَا رَمَيْتَ إِذْ رَمَيْتَ وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ رَمَى (and you did not hurl the stones on the enemy, but it was Allah who had hurled them, (8:17)).

(4) A look at the prayer ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib had uttered while he was invoking the Almighty’s help shows that its words are overflowing with faith in the Almighty. They are the words of a person who is very disturbed and worried over a situation, yet he is very hopeful of the Almighty’s help. There is not the slightest indication that these words were uttered by someone who had run from the battlefield. Those who have derived this meaning from the prayer can only be lauded for their “subtle” sense of appreciation. If ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib had retreated in the mountains and prayed to the Almighty, it does not mean that he had withdrawn from the defence of the Baytullāh. A little deliberation shows that some of his words have the same grace of confidence in the Almighty as the prayer the Prophet (sws) had uttered amidst the battle of Badr. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib’s prayer is like a glorious martial song which has the scent of faith and trust in it. Consider how effectively it invokes the Almighty’s help:⁹

لَا هُمْ إِلَّا الْمَرْءُ يَم
نَعُ رَحْلَهُ فَاْمُنْعَ جِلَالُكَ

لَا يَغْلِبَنَّ صُلَيْبُهُمْ
وَمِحَالُهُمْ أَبَدًا مِحَالُكَ

إِنْ كُنْتَ تَارَكَهُمْ وَقَبْ
لَتَنَا فَأْمُرْ مَا بَدَا لَكَ

(O Lord! A man protects his family, so protect Your people. Let

9. Al-Jāhiz, *Al-Hayawān*, vol. 7, 198-199.

not their cross and their strength overpower You. If You want to leave our Qiblah at their mercy, then do as You please.)

After such a display of honour and integrity, can someone be regarded as a deserter?

Therefore, in the consideration of this writer, the view that the Quraysh had not faced the enemy, and that the birds had destroyed the enemy by flinging stones at them is totally baseless. The subject (*fā'il*) of the verb *تَرَى*, in this writer's opinion, is the tribe of Quraysh who are addressed by the words *أَلَمْ تَرَ* at the beginning of the *sūrah*. This verb is not at all appropriate for birds. The birds can drop stones held in their beaks and claws, but this cannot be termed *ramī*. This verb can only be used when "the drop" has the power of an arm, a string or a wind behind it. Even the commentators who hold the general view have also felt its inaptness. They had to "make up" the interpretation that the birds dropped stones of the size of peas, which passed through the bodies of the elephant's bodies. By this interpretation, they were able to demonstrate the effectiveness of the process, but in reality this cannot be termed *ramī*.

The word *سَجِيل* (*sijīl*) is the Arabicized form of the Persian word *sang-i gil*. Its English equivalent in the opinion of this writer is 'pebble'. It has been indicated before that the Arabs had a weak defence. The battle could have been termed hotly contested if it was fought by swords and spears and the two armies were arrayed in a battle field, and if the enemy had elephants, the Quraysh at least had horses. This, as pointed out before, was not possible; so they opted to retreat in the mountains and impede the enemy advance by hurling stones at them. Obviously, this was a weak defence and just to show the weak nature of defence, the words *يَجَارَةُ مَنْ سَجِيلٍ* are used by the Qur'an.

¹⁰ فَجَعَلَهُمْ كَعَصْفٍ مَّأْكُولٍ (٥)

This verse expresses how the might and power of the Almighty turned the tables on Abrahah's army. Since his people had striven to their utmost, He according to His law helped them, and made their enemy like straw eaten away. To call something by the fate it shall finally meet is a common linguistic style of Arabic: *كَعَصْفٍ مَّأْكُولٍ* being an example.

It should be noted here that act of *ramī* (throwing) has been related to the people addressed, but rendering the enemy into "straw eaten away" has been attributed to the Almighty's power. The reason is that it was not possible for the Arabs alone to destroy their enemy. The Almighty

helped them by unleashing a ravaging stone hurling wind on the enemy, after the Quraysh themselves had started flinging stones on them in the valley of Maḥassar. This *ḥāṣib*, as has been indicated before, was reported by many eye witnesses. It has also been mentioned earlier, that the Quraysh had adopted similar tactics in the battle of Aḥzāb and then too “a wind” was sent to help them.

Only one question now remains. If the actual fact is that the forces of Abrahah were destroyed by the stone hurling of the Quraysh and by the *ḥāṣib* sent by the Almighty, and not by the birds, who had only come to eat away the dead, then the verses should have had the following order: وَأَرْسَلَ عَلَيْهِمْ طَيْرًا أَبَابِيلَ فَجَعَلَهُمْ كَعَصْفٍ مَأْكُولٍ تَرْمِيهِمْ بِحِجَارَةٍ مِّن سِجِّيلٍ (you pelted them with clay stones. And Allah made them like straw eaten way. And sent down against them swarms of birds.) In the opinion of this writer, the people who have raised this question are not aware of a certain rhetorical styles of Arabic. In this style, just to project the consequences – good or bad – of a certain event, they are listed before expressing all the details. To express the swiftness in the acceptance of prayers, this style has been adopted by the Qur’ān at many places. The following verses of Sūrah Nūh clearly testify to this:

قَالَ نُوحٌ رَّبِّ إِنَّهُمْ عَصَوْنِي وَاتَّبَعُوا مَن لَّمْ يَزِدْهُ مَالُهُ وَوَلَدُهُ إِلَّا خَسَارًا وَمَكَرُوا مَكْرًا كَبِيرًا وَقَالُوا لَا تَذَرُنَّ آلِهَتَكُمْ وَلَا تَذَرُنَّ وَدًّا وَلَا سُوَاعًا وَلَا يَغُوثَ وَيَعُوقَ وَنَسْرًا وَقَدْ أَضَلُّوا كَثِيرًا وَلَا تَزِدِ الظَّالِمِينَ إِلَّا ضَلَالًا مِّمَّا خَطِيئَاتِهِمْ أُغْرِقُوا فَأُدْخِلُوا نَارًا فَلَمْ يَجِدُوا لَهُمْ مِّن دُونِ اللَّهِ أَنْصَارًا وَقَالَ نُوحٌ رَبِّ لَا تَذَرْ عَلَى الْأَرْضِ مِنَ الْكَافِرِينَ دَيَّارًا إِنَّكَ إِن تَذَرَهُمْ يُضِلُّوا عِبَادَكَ وَلَا يَلِدُوا إِلَّا فَاجِرًا كَفَّارًا (٢٧:٧١)

Nūh cried: O my lord! they have disobeyed me and followed those whose wealth and children only increased their loss; they contrived big evil schemes and seduced their nation by saying: do not ever renounce your gods; forsake not Wadd nor Suwā’ neither Yagūth nor Nasr [and O my Lord!] they have misled many and You only increase the wrongdoers in their wrong doing. Hence, because of their sins they were overwhelmed by the flood and cast into the fire. And they found none besides Allah to help them. And Nūh said: O Lord! Leave not a single disbeliever in the earth. If you spare them they will mislead thy servants and beget none but wicked and ungrateful ones. (71:21-27)

If one reflects on the above verses, it becomes clear that just after the Prophet Nūh (sws) had uttered the first sentence of his prayer, the fate of his nation has been depicted while the remaining prayer has been deferred, though obviously they would have met this fate after the whole prayer. The reason for this is that only to show the speediness in the acceptance of the prayer a certain sentence has been placed earlier. Likewise, in the present *sūrah*, just to depict the dreadful fate of the foes of Abrahah, the mention of sending down birds against them is made before the mention of their destruction. Since the central theme of the *sūrah* revolves round recounting the favours of the Almighty on the Quraysh, rhetorical principles dictate that the dreadful fate of the enemies be portrayed first.

My mentor, Ḥamīd al-Dīn Farāhī, has dealt at length with the various aspects of this *sūrah*. Brevity has restricted me to omit many of his views which are very important as regards the explanation of the *sūrah*. Among other details which offer a fresh insight into the *sūrah*, he considers the *hajj* ritual of *ramī-i jamarāt* as a symbolic representation of the *ramī* “done” by the Quraysh on Abrahah’s forces. I advise the readers to go through his interpretation of the *sūrah* as well, which will also bring out the very delicate difference between his views and the ones held by his humble pupil.

Sūrah Quraysh

Central Theme

This *sūrah* is the counterpart of the previous Sūrah Fīl the previous *sūrah*. A comprehensive treatment of the central theme of both these *sūrahs* is given in the exegetical explanation of the preceding *sūrah*. Briefly, it can be restated as: the Quraysh are asked to fulfil the natural right of their association with the Baytullāh, after a thorough indication is made to them about the nature of this association.

Relationship with the Previous Sūrah

In the previous *sūrah*, it is pointed out that the Quraysh are living peacefully and securely in this land because of their affiliation with the Baytullāh. In this *sūrah*, it is asserted that it is this affiliation which also accounts for their provisions of livelihood and sustenance. Both these favours entail the worship of the Lord of this House, instead of associating others with Him without any rational basis.

The foremost things which a good state provides its citizens with are peace and sustenance. In the holy land of Makkah, the Quraysh had been the beneficiaries of these blessings because of the Prophet Abraham (sws) through the Baytullāh. As a natural right of these blessings, the Quraysh should have been grateful to the Lord of this House, but instead they became involved in outrageous forms of polytheism, inducting within its precincts fictitious gods and goddesses. With this background, they are admonished in this *sūrah* to remain deeply conscious of their relation with the Baytullāh – which the Almighty Himself had given in their trusteeship. It was because of the Baytullāh that the whole atmosphere had become peaceful and secure for them; this special status had also been instrumental in securing for them lavish resources of sustenance and livelihood. If they now show ingratitude to the Lord of the House, then they deserve to be deposed from this prestigious position and be divested from all the benefits, both spiritual and material, they possess on account of it.

Analysis of the Sūrah

First of all, a reference is made to the special affiliation of the Quraysh with the Baytullāh and the holy Land of Makkah. Next, an indication is

made to the trade excursions they regularly undertook in winters and summers, upon which depended their financial prosperity. Their economic well-being heavily relied on these tours and being the custodians of the Baytullāh, success in these tours was virtually guaranteed. Once ousted from this position they could never achieve the privilege of being guided through these routes unscathed, where danger openly lurked for all other tribes.

Text and Translation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

لِإِيلَافٍ قُرَيْشٍ (١) إِيْلَافِهِمْ رِحْلَةَ الشِّتَاءِ وَالصَّيْفِ (٢) فَلْيَعْبُدُوا رَبَّ هَذَا الْبَيْتِ (٣)
الَّذِي أَطْعَمَهُمْ مِّنْ جُوعٍ وَآمَنَهُمْ مِّنْ خَوْفٍ (٤)

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Ever Merciful.

Owing to the association the Quraysh have – the association they have with the winter and summer journeys. So, they should worship the Lord of this House who fed them because of hunger and provided them with peace because of fear. (1-4)

Explanation

¹ لِإِيلَافٍ قُرَيْشٍ (١)

إِلَافَ الْمَكَانِ وَالْفَهْ إِيْلَافًا means تَعَوَّدَهُ وَاسْتَأْنَسَ بِهِ (he is used to this place and is familiar with it).

جَعَلْتُهُ يَأْلَفُهُ means آَلَفْتُهُ مَكَانَ كَذَا إِيْلَافًا (I made him familiar with this place).

آَلَفَهُ مُؤَالَفَةً وَالْإِفَاءَ means أَنْسَهُ وَعَاشَرَهُ (he became accustomed to him, he resided with him).'

This explanation clearly shows that there is no essential difference between إِيْلَافًا and الْإِفَاءَ. Both mean attachment, association, and affiliation. Although it is not clear from this first verse with whom the association is implied, yet the subsequent verses qualify the association as the one the Quraysh had with the Baytullāh as its custodians and overseers, as a result of which they had been reaping many benefits.

In other words, the Quraysh are reminded here in this verse that the honour and prestige they had attained in Makkah in particular and in Arabia in general, because of which they had gained extraordinary material benefits, were not because of their own ability and planning, but

1. Owing to the association the Quraysh have.

because of their association with the House of their Lord. They must always remain aware about the nature of this relationship not only with this sacred House but also with its Lord. They should not become inebriated with these worldly successes and thereby forget the rights and obligations imposed on them about this House and its Lord.

إِيْلَافِهِمْ رِحْلَةَ الشِّتَاءِ وَالصَّيْفِ (٢)²

Īlāf is the permutative (*badal*) of *Īlāf* of the first verse. Initially, the subject had just been raised and left incomplete to raise a question among the addressed people about the nature of the association of the Quraysh. This style has also been adopted elsewhere in the Qur'ān. The style is useful, first of all, to direct the attention of those addressed, and secondly to firmly establish something in their minds by repeating it in two different ways.

This verse explains that the association under discussion is the one the Quraysh have with their trade journeys of summers and winters. It should be kept in mind that during the winter season the Quraysh used to travel to Yemen, while their summers were spent journeying towards Syria and Palestine. With these caravans travelled the wealth of the whole nation. The reason was that there were many traders and businessmen who acted as agents of those who could invest money, and, hence, people who did not go along with these caravans were also able to benefit from this profitable business. It was these tours which were the real source of wealth for the Makkan people. By this means, merchandise reached other markets and at the same time their own consumers were able to buy goods from other markets. Thus, these trade routes were the real source of sustenance for the Quraysh. Although these were international trade routes, yet they were safe in the true sense of the word for the Quraysh only. The extent of protection provided to them was not provided to any other tribe. Other tribes were robbed in broad daylight, and had to seek permission by paying huge amounts to the tribe whose territory they had to pass, but the Quraysh enjoyed unlimited freedom and liberty. They were even provided with people who acted as guides and no one could even think of tampering with them, for they were given a special respect as the custodians of Baytullāh and caretakers of the pilgrims. It is with all this background that the Qur'ān admonishes them not to become inebriated with these worldly successes and forget the Lord of this House. All these successes are due to the Baytullāh, and they shall only remain their beneficiaries if they

2. – The association they have with the winter and summer journeys.

remain sincere with the causes of the exalted House.

It should be borne in mind, that it was no stroke of luck through which the Quraysh had become the custodians of the Baytullāh. It was not just by chance that they had come from somewhere and settled in its whereabouts, and later became its custodians; in fact, it was the Prophet Abraham (sws) who had purposefully established the abode of his son Ismael (sws) and his progeny in the vicinity of Baytullāh to achieve a certain mission associated with it. He had made a special invocation to the Almighty to bless them with peace and sustenance. In other words, the Quraysh are reminded of their past that they had been settled here for a special purpose. They must fulfil this covenant with all sincerity, otherwise they would be doomed not only in this world but in the Hereafter as well. The Qur'ān says:

وَإِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ رَبِّ اجْعَلْ هَذَا الْبَلَدَ آمِنًا وَاجْنُبْنِي وَبَنِيَّ أَنْ نَعْبُدَ الْأَصْنَامَ رَبِّ
إِنَّهُمْ أَضَلُّنَا كَثِيرًا مِّنَ النَّاسِ فَمَنْ تَبِعَنِي فَإِنَّهُ مِنِّي وَمَنْ عَصَانِي فَإِنَّكَ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ
رَبَّنَا إِنِّي أَسْكَنْتُ مِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِي بِوَادٍ غَيْرِ ذِي زَرْعٍ عِنْدَ بَيْتِكَ الْمُحَرَّمِ رَبَّنَا لِيُقِيمُوا
الصَّلَاةَ فَاجْعَلْ أَفْنِدَةً مِّنَ النَّاسِ تَهْوِي إِلَيْهِمْ وَارْزُقْهُمْ مِّنَ الثَّمَرَاتِ لَعَلَّهُمْ
يَشْكُرُونَ (١٤: ٣٥-٣٧)

And remember when Abraham prayed: O Lord! make this land one of peace and security. Preserve me and my sons from worshipping idols. Lord, they have led many men astray. Those then who follow my [ways] are of me but for those who disobey me, You are surely Forgiving and Merciful. O our Lord! I have settled some of my offspring in a barren valley near Your sacred House that they may establish regular prayers, so incline people's hearts towards them and provide them with fruits in order that they may be thankful. (14: 35-37)

It is evident from these verses, as mentioned earlier, that Abraham had settled his children near Baytullāh with a special purpose for which it was built. He had prayed to the Almighty to bless them with peace and sustenance and make them a people towards whom everyone would turn in all the affairs of life. The Almighty accepted this prayer, and the Quraysh remained the beneficiaries of these favours in every period. The Quraysh are reminded in this *sūrah* of this very association with the Baytullāh. It would be gross ingratitude on their part to relish all the material benefits from this association, but become indifferent to its

rights and their obligations. The House was built to worship the One and Alone God and prevent people from worshipping idols, and it was precisely for this reason that Abraham (sws) had established the abode of his children in a barren stretch of land. Instead of fulfilling this purpose they had stuffed it with all kinds of idols who reigned supreme in it, in place of the Creator of the heavens and the earth.

فَلْيَعْبُدُوا رَبَّ هَذَا الْبَيْتِ (۳) الَّذِي أَطْعَمَهُمْ مِّنْ جُوعٍ وَآمَنَهُمْ مِّنْ خَوْفٍ (۴)³

The verse states the rights of the blessings of peace and sustenance bestowed on the Quraysh by the Almighty. They should be grateful to Him and worship Him with all sincerity. It should be kept in mind, that in spite of being implicated in horrible forms of polytheism, they had never disassociated themselves with the concept of God in their religious beliefs. Not for a moment did they consider any of the idols placed in the Baytullāh as its real Lord. Even a cursory glance at ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib’s prayer⁴ at the time Abrahah attacked the Baytullāh and referred to in the previous *sūrah* shows the essence of *tawḥīd* abounding in it; there is not the slightest indication of invoking help from any other deity, save the real Lord of the House. In fact, the Quraysh only regarded their idols a means to procure the nearness of God – whom they always considered their real Creator and Sustainer, and there never ever came a change in this stance.

الَّذِي أَطْعَمَهُمْ مِّنْ جُوعٍ وَآمَنَهُمْ مِّنْ خَوْفٍ: In this verse *مِّنْ* is that of causation (*sababiyah*) and the words جُوع (*jū*) and خَوْف (*khawf*) have special connotations. By جُوع is meant the specific condition of an area which arises owing to a scarcity of edibles, and by خَوْف is meant the state of an area which arises owing to a lack of security and creates a constant danger to life and wealth. Both these words are used in these meanings in other places of the Qur’ān as well:

وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنَ الْخَوْفِ وَالْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَنْفُسِ وَالثَّمَرَاتِ (۲: ۱۵۵)

We shall test you with something of *al-kawf* [fear] and *al-jū* [famine] with loss of life, wealth and crops. (2:155)

The Ḥaram, (land around the Baytullāh) before the advent of Abraham

3. Hence, they should worship the Lord of this House who fed them because of hunger and provided them with peace because of fear.

4. O Lord! a man protects his family, so You protect your people. Their cross and their strength should never overpower You. If you want to leave our *Qiblah* (the *Baytullāh*) at their mercy, then do as you please.

had always remained scarce in food resources and was also in a constant state of strife and unrest. It was because of the Baytullāh that the Almighty blessed the area with peace and ample sources of sustenance. At many instances these favours are recounted in the Qur'ān:

أَوَلَمْ نُمْكِّنْ لَهُمْ حَرَمًا آمِنًا يُجْبَىٰ إِلَيْهِ ثَمَرَاتُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ (٥٧:٢٨)

Have We not established for them a secure sanctuary towards which all kinds of produce are being drawn? (28:57)

أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا أَنَّا جَعَلْنَا حَرَمًا آمِنًا وَيُتَخَفُّ النَّاسُ مِنْ حَوْلِهِمْ (٦٧:٢٩)

Have they not seen that We have made a sanctuary secure while people are being snatched away from all around them? (29:67)

This *sūrah* is another instance where the same subject is brought up. Both peace and sustenance are special blessings of the Almighty. The Quraysh are admonished here to be grateful to the Almighty and remain aware that this gratitude entails His worship, not revolt, vanity or disobedience.

Sūrah Mā‘ūn

Relationship with Preceding and Succeeding Sūrahs

In the previous pair of *sūrahs* – Fīl and Quraysh – it is explained that the tribe of Quraysh has been blessed with the favours of peace and sustenance because of the Baytullāh (the House of God). These blessings should have induced them to worshipping the Lord of this Sacred House with all sincerity and should have striven to fulfil the objective for which it was built and given in their custody. In the succeeding pair of *sūrahs*, – Mā‘ūn and Kawthar – the characters of the Quraysh chiefs is initially depicted who at the time of revelation of these *sūrahs* were the overseers and custodians of the Baytullāh. It is subsequently asserted that they are no longer fit to be the trustees of this exalted House. They have grossly failed to carry out the assignment and deserve to be deposed from this prestigious position, which will now be handed over to those worthy of it.

In this particular *sūrah*, the petty character of a leader of the Quraysh is portrayed. The portrayal includes a strong element of amazement, in fact hate and disgust, on his attitude of callously driving away orphans. This attitude clearly reflects his disbelief in the Day of Judgement. Although the person is not addressed by name, yet it is quite evident that Abū Lahab’s character is under discussion. It was he who at the time of revelation of the *sūrah* had all the financial resources of the Baytullāh under his sole control. A depiction of the characters of the people follows who, though, apparently offer their prayers in the Baytullāh, yet their prayers lack spirit and devotion and are in fact a show of pretence on their part. A person who is not sincere in his relationship with his Creator can never be a well-wisher of his fellow beings. He will always be a miser in his dealings and will never have the heart to even lend small items of general use, not to speak of spending in the way of Allah.

It should be kept in mind that the Baytullāh had been built for two reasons. Firstly, to be the centre of worship of the one and only God; and secondly, to cater for the needs, physical as well as emotional, of the orphans and the poor. It was the duty of its custodians to carry out these tasks. But since the individuals whose unworthy characters are depicted cannot be expected to fulfil the duty, the next *sūrah* – Kawthar – decides their fate once and for all.

Text and Translation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
 أَرَأَيْتَ الَّذِي يُكَذِّبُ بِالدِّينِ (١) فَذَلِكَ الَّذِي يَدْعُ الْيَتِيمَ (٢) وَلَا يَحْضُ عَلَى طَعَامِ
 الْمُسْكِينِ (٣) قَوْلٌ لِلْمُصَلِّينَ (٤) الَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنْ صَلَاتِهِمْ سَاهُونَ (٥) الَّذِينَ هُمْ يُرَاوُونَ
 (٦) وَيَمْنَعُونَ الْمَاعُونَ (٧)

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Ever Merciful.

Have you seen the one who belies reward and punishment?! He it is who drives away the orphan, and urges not the feeding of the poor. (1-3)

So devastation be to these who pray, who are indifferent to their prayer; who put on a pretentious display, and are stingy even in ordinary items of common use. (4-7)

Explanation

أَرَأَيْتَ الَّذِي يُكَذِّبُ بِالدِّينِ (١)¹

The word أَرَأَيْتَ is used to engage the attention of a reader by expressing surprise and dislike at the attitude of a person or a group of persons. The word الدِّين here means “reward and punishment” as in مَالِكِ الدِّينِ (٣: ١) (the Master of the Day of Judgement).

The antecedent of the conjunctive pronoun الَّذِي (he who) is not stated, but the context readily indicates that Abū Lahab's character is being symbolized. He was an extremely rich yet stingy person, who was in charge of the *rifādah* or the treasury of the Baytullāh at the time of revelation of this *sūrah*. His mean personality and his ultimate destruction are depicted in a complete *sūrah* – *Lahab*. It will become evident from a study of that *sūrah* that he considered the *rifādah* as his own property and consumed its funds for personal purposes, and had thereby become the Qārūn of Makkah. Here, it is actually intended to point out his hard-heartedness that no good can be expected from such a ruthless person who drives away orphans in spite of being assigned to their welfare, but the style adopted is such that it unfolds his internal nature that is actually the cause of this callousness.

The adjective يُكَذِّبُ بِالدِّينِ (denier of reward and punishment) highlights his inner self. A person who denies the Day of Judgement cannot have any motivation to expend his wealth in the path of God to please Him as well as to secure the welfare and well-being of his fellow

1. Have you seen the one who belies reward and punishment?!

brethren. Such a person can only “drain his wealth” for his own self or to put up a false show of concern for the poor. Only a true belief in the Final Day can induce a person to spend on the deprived without having a vested self-interest. This fact has also been highlighted in Sūrah Layl:

فَأَمَّا مَنْ أَعْطَى وَاتَّقَى وَصَدَّقَ بِالْحُسْنَى فَسَنُيَسِّرُهُ لِلْيُسْرَى وَأَمَّا مَنْ بَخِلَ وَاسْتَغْنَى
وَكَذَّبَ بِالْحُسْنَى فَسَنُيَسِّرُهُ لِلْعُسْرَى (٩٢: ١٠-٥)

As for him who gives and fears [the Lord] and testifies to a good fate, We shall smooth out an easy way for him. But he who is a greedy miser and is heedless [to the Day of Judgement] and testifies to a bad fate, We shall indeed smooth out for him the path of hardships. (92:5-10)

فَذَلِكَ الَّذِي يَدْعُ الْيَتِيمَ²

دَع means “to push and shove”, as is used in Sūrah Tūr:

يَوْمَ يُدْعُونَ إِلَى نَارِ جَهَنَّمَ دَعًّا (٥٢: ١٣)

On that day, they shall be sternly shoved in the fire of Hell. (52:13)

According to the Qur'ān, orphans should be treated with regard and respect. It rebukes those who disregard them:

كَلَّا بَلْ لَا تُكْرِمُونَ الْيَتِيمَ (٨٩: ١٧)

Nay, you honour not the orphans. (89:17)

In an Islamic society, as the caliph Abū Bakr (rta) once said, the weak are the strongest and the most influential unless they are given their rights. Hence, every person of a society is required to deeply respect the people who are yet to receive their rights. Every Muslim who has a sense of honour in him should uphold their cause and strive to obtain their rights for them.

وَلَا يَحْضُ عَلَى طَعَامِ الْمَسْكِينِ³

This verse restates in a negative sense what is said above. It says that a person who maltreats orphans is the last one who would urge others to sympathize with them. Psychologically, every miser wishes to hide his

2. He it is who drives away the orphan

3. And urges not the feeding of the poor.

miserliness by desiring his fellow-beings to follow in his footsteps so that there is no one who can call him a miser. Consequently, any person who, contrary to his wishes, spends on the poor becomes a target of his jeers and taunts which are meant to discourage him from indulging in this “wasteful activity” in the very beginning, as is pointed out in Sūrah Humazah.

It should be kept in mind that, as indicated before, the character of the person who controlled and directed the welfare department for the poor of the Baytullāh is portrayed here. In other words, it is implied that when a thief assumes the seat of a judge, the result is not difficult to predict.

فَوَيْلٌ لِلْمُصَلِّينَ (٤) الَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنْ صَلَاتِهِمْ سَاهُونَ (٥)⁴

The verse points out the lack of purity and devotion in the prayer of the religious pundits of the Baytullāh. Since they have to maintain their religious and social standings as the custodians of the Baytullāh, they put up a false show of worship in front of the general masses. Such a show certainly cannot instil in them the real spirit of worship, which becomes nothing but a matter of fooling the public.

It should be borne in mind that the real purpose for which the Baytullāh was built was the establishment of the prayer. Abraham (sws) settled his son Ishmael (sws) in its vicinity to enable himself and his progeny to establish this institution of worship. For this very purpose, he had also prayed to the Almighty to grant them peace and sustenance in that land. His humble invocation to the Almighty is cited in the Qur'ān as follows:

رَبَّنَا إِنِّي أَسْكَنْتُ مِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِي بِوَادٍ غَيْرِ ذِي زَرْعٍ عِنْدَ بَيْتِكَ الْمُحَرَّمِ رَبَّنَا لِيُقِيمُوا
الصَّلَاةَ (٣٧:١٤)

O our Lord! I have settled some of my offspring in a barren valley near your Sacred House; in order, our Lord! that they may establish regular prayer. (14:37)

How Ishmael (sws) fulfilled this obligation, the Qur'ān itself testifies:

وَكَانَ يَأْمُرُ أَهْلَهُ بِالصَّلَاةِ وَالزَّكَاةِ وَكَانَ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِ مَرْضِيًّا (٥٥:١٩)

He used to enjoin the prayer and *zakāh* on his people. (19:55)

Even in later times, when sorcerers and innovators held sway in the

4. So devastation be to these who pray, who are indifferent to their prayer.

land, the institutions of prayer and *zakāh* continued, though they became completely distorted and disfigured. How the directive of *zakāh* had been mutilated is pointed out above. What fate the prayer reached is mentioned in Sūrah Anfāl as follows:

وَمَا كَانَ صَلَاتُهُمْ عِنْدَ الْبَيْتِ إِلَّا مُكَاءٌ وَتَصْدِيَةٌ فَذُوقُوا الْعَذَابَ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ
تَكْفُرُونَ (٣٥:٨)

Their prayer at the Baytullāh is nothing but whistling and clapping of hands. (8:35)

Even in this distorted shape, these rituals continued to exist, and just as the leaders of every period put up a display of religiosity to feign austerity, the leaders of the Quraysh too on special occasions upheld these practices. This verse actually upbraids such unworthy persons as are unaware of the real essence of the prayer by sounding a severe warning to them.

الَّذِينَ هُمْ يُرَآؤُونَ (٦) وَيَمْنَعُونَ الْمَاعُونَ (٧)⁵

This verse further delineates their show of false pretence. In fact, it asserts two reasons behind the lack of purity and devotion in their prayers: pretentiousness and miserliness.

Purity and sincerity of intention is the essence of prayers, that is they should be offered just to please the Almighty and to win His favour and affection. If they are offered for any other motive, they lose their purpose, and in fact become detrimental to their very cause. The prayer of the custodians of the Baytullāh had become adulterated not only with their ill-beliefs but also, as indicated before, with their false intentions. Quite evidently, such a prayer is nothing more than a theatrical enactment. Just as impersonating a character in a drama does not actually make a person one of them, likewise people who feign the articles of prayer do not become true worshippers.

Moreover, their miserliness too is an ample proof of the perfunctory nature of their prayer. The real spirit behind the prayer is a feeling of gratitude to the Almighty. A person who is grateful to his Creator can never be a miser or a skinflint. Instead, he is bound to be unselfish and magnanimous. He spends on the deprived and needy, not as a favour on them but because they have a rightful claim on his own wealth. In fact, he is so overwhelmed with this sense of gratitude that fulfilling others'

5. Those who put on a pretentious display, and are stingy even in ordinary items of common use.

needs even at his own expense is a source of tremendous satisfaction to him. From the point of view of the philosophy of religion also, prayer and spending in the way of God have a deep relationship; for the prayer is the foremost manifestation of the feeling of gratitude, and such a prayer subsequently motivates a person to spend on the needy. It can be safely said that the whole edifice of the *sharī'ah* is based on these two pillars of faith.

Consider next the verse *يَمْنَعُونَ الْمَاعُونَ*: *يَمْنَعُونَ* means items of common use. It is perfectly in accordance with the norms of social relationships to borrow such items from a neighbour. Many a time such needs arise and it is but natural to ask for such things in close associations. Borrowing and lending such items is in fact a sign of a healthy social set-up and promotes ties of friendship and fraternity between people. Every decent person should be happy to help out his neighbour if at any time he needs for example a knife, a cooking pot, bedding items or even a matchbox. Only mean people can refuse assistance on such occasions. Also, whenever such mean and niggardly people pray, they do only to impress others because they have no inner motivation for it. Neither does such a prayer influence their hearts. In fact, ostentation in such a sacred affair increases their callousness

Some people, because of the words "So devastation be to these who pray ..." maintain that the *sūrah* was revealed in Madīnah. They contend that such people who used to pretend righteousness could not have existed in Makkah, and must be regarded as a product of the later Madi#nan period. The reason behind this misconception is that they consider the prayer mentioned here as the one obligated by Islam, whereas it implies, as this writer has explained above, the prayer whose establishment had been ordained by the Almighty to the prophet Ishmael (sws) and his progeny along with the directive of building the Baytullāh. This prayer was adopted and offered in later times, though it lost its original form and shape because of innovations, which over the years gained a stronghold in the religious thought of the Arabs.

Sūrah Kawthar

Central Theme

In the previous Sūrah Mā'ūn, the previous *sūrah* it is explained to the leaders of the Quraysh that they had totally disregarded the purpose for which Abraham (sws) had settled his children in the whereabouts of the Baytullāh, and for which he had prayed to the Almighty to bless them with peace and sustenance. It is also pointed out that the Baytullāh had been built for the worship of the One and Alone Allah and to safeguard the rights of the poor and the orphans, but the people who were at that time in charge of it were showing utter disregard to its objectives. Obviously, this mention is directed at the false claim of the Quraysh, which they proudly cherished that being the custodians of the Baytullāh they would be given special treatment by the Almighty and no one would depose them. However, in the previous *sūrah* they were only presented a charge sheet of all their misdeeds; the punishment which they deserved had not been stated. It is in this *sūrah* that their fate is separately depicted. The Prophet (sws) is addressed directly and given the glad tidings that the Baytullāh has been taken away from these unscrupulous people and consigned to his custody; he should therefore solely pray for the Almighty and offer sacrifice for Him only and light the candle of monotheism in the Baytullāh. A warning has also been sounded to the disbelievers that after being dislodged from the Baytullāh they will also be deprived of all the favours they enjoyed on account of it and that finally they will be uprooted from the land. The Almighty shall now shower these favours on those who will assume its responsibility and fulfil its rights. They are the ones who, after rising to political ascendancy in the land will befittingly fulfil the objectives for which it was built.

This *sūrah*, as is indicated above, gives glad tidings to the Prophet (sws). The particle of stress **إِنَّا** (We indeed) and the use of the past tense in **أَعْطَيْنَاكَ** (We have bestowed to you) is to express the certainty of the promise. There are many examples of the use of this linguistic device in the Qur'ān. Whatever has been decided by the Almighty is ultimate and no one can alter it. Therefore, even if these decisions pertain to the future, they are mentioned in the past tense to express the certainty of their occurrence particularly when some good news about the future is to be conveyed.

At the end of the Makkan period, when the oppressive attitude of the disbelievers was reaching its peak, many verses were revealed at various times in which the Prophet (sws) and the Muslims were addressed and given glad tidings of victory and domination. This *sūrah* is one example. However, precisely because of this prediction, many commentators including my teacher Imam Hamīd al-Dīn Farāhī hold that it was revealed during the truce of Hudaibiyyah. But in my humble opinion, the *sūrah* was revealed just before the Prophet's migration to Madīnah. The glad tidings of a grand victory have been given in many *sūrahs* of the pre-migration period to the Muslims to comfort and assure them, as can be seen in the last Makkan *Sūrahs* of each group; needless to cite any example.

The Quraysh, right from the beginning, very well knew that their real point of difference with the Prophet (sws) was the question that who among them was following the creed of Abraham (sws). As a natural corollary of this difference, they maintained that only those who are the heirs to Abraham's true creed have the right to be the custodians of the Baytullāh. Their arrogance in this regard had reached such an extent that they could not even tolerate the Prophet (sws) and his Companions praying in the Baytullāh. On the other hand, the Muslims through the Prophet's mission and the message he was propagating were well aware that the Quraysh's hold on the Baytullāh was against all principles and to liberate the Baytullāh from their hold was the real purpose of the Prophet's mission.

The two parties also knew that whoever would be dissociated from the Baytullāh would be left all by itself in Arabia and would have no place to go. Therefore, to comfort and solace the Prophet (sws) and the Muslims at the time of the migration to Madīnah, it was necessary to convey to them that they would definitely displace the Quraysh from the Baytullāh and take over its guardianship; that the tussle which was going on with the Quraysh would culminate in their success and that the Prophet of Allah would not be extirpated from the land as the Quraysh contended; rather the enemies of the Prophet (sws) are the ones who would totally be humbled. In fact, it was the glad tidings about His Divine Help in the future which made the grim and exacting task of migration an easy undertaking for the Muslims and which otherwise, as every one knows, was an extremely difficult affair.

Text and Translation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
 إِنَّا أَعْطَيْنَاكَ الْكَوْثَرَ (١) فَصَلِّ لِرَبِّكَ وَانْحَرْ (٢) إِنَّ شَانِئَكَ هُوَ الْأَبْتَرُ (٣)

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Ever Merciful.

Upon you have We bestowed Kawthar, so pray only for your Lord and offer sacrifice only for Him. Indeed, it is your enemy who shall be severed.

Explanation

¹ إِنَّا أَعْطَيْنَاكَ الْكَوْثَرَ (١)

كَوْثَرٌ is the intensive form of كَثُرَ which means “wealth and affluence”. Therefore, كَوْثَرٌ would mean “a lot of abundance” or “somebody having a lot abundance and affluence”. It is a noun and is used as an adjective also.

According to linguistic principles, the word كَوْثَرٌ can have the following three meanings:

1. As a word which, in the course of its usage, has been transformed into a noun specifying something named by the Almighty as كَوْثَرٌ.

2. It could be considered as an adjective of a qualified noun which has been suppressed because, as an adjective, it specifies a particular noun so clearly that only its mention brings to mind the noun it qualifies, or there exists a definite indication of this noun from within the context. For example, it is said رَجَالٌ مَرْدٌ عَلَى جُرْدٍ which is actually رَجَالٌ مَرْدٌ عَلَى حَيْلٍ جُرْدٍ (young men on purely bred horses). Similarly, consider the first verse of Sūrah Dhāriyāt: وَالرَّيَّاحُ الدَّارِيَّاتِ دَرَوَا which is actually وَالرَّيَّاحُ الدَّارِيَّاتِ دَرَوَا (By the winds who scatter dust).

3. It can be regarded as a simple adjective having the general meaning it connotes. In such a case, everything having immense good can be considered as its connotation. Although, because of certain clear indications, it could imply definite objects.

Consider next, the meanings of the word attributed to it by our worthy commentators of the past. Ibn Jarīr has mentioned three of them:

(i) كَوْثَرٌ is a water channel in heaven. This is the opinion of ‘Ā’ishah (rta), Ibn ‘Abbās (rta), Ibn Umar (rta), Anas (rta), Mujāhid and Abu# al-‘Āliyah.

(ii) كَوْثَرٌ means immense good. This is held by Ibn ‘Abbās (rta), Sa’id ibn Jubayr (rta), ‘Ikramah, Qatādah and Mujāhid.

(iii) كَوْثَرٌ is a pond in heaven. This view is maintained by ‘Aṭā.

There is not much difference between the first and third meanings cited above. The pond may be of the water channel mentioned foremost. Only two possibilities now remain: either to regard it as a word which denotes a specific thing, for example “a pond of paradise” or “a water channel in heaven”, or to regard it as connoting everything which has unbounded good in it.

My mentor Imam Farāhī has aptly related the two meanings with each other making them the same. By taking into consideration the context of the *sūrah* in the Qur’ān as well as certain inherent testimonies, he opines that كَوْنٌ means the Baytullāh, which due to various reasons is a treasure of immense good and is a symbol of the pond of paradise in this world. This pond shall be given to the Prophet (sws) in the next.

Imam Farāhī’s arguments can be seen from the following extract from his exegesis:²

It has been stated in the previous sections that our worthy commentators of the past do not differ on the fact that كَوْنٌ means a pond of paradise. In fact, they have even gone on to include in the meaning all possible things that can come within the sphere of “immense good”, keeping in view the general meaning of the word and the past tense of the verse in which it occurs. This would render a diversity in its meaning and make it stand for something that actually possesses the attribute implicitly in its name. Precisely for this reason, the later commentators, consider research in its meaning perfectly allowable.³ If it were some sort of an innovation they would never have indulged in it nor would the early commentators have differed in it. Therefore, if I interpret the word in a sense which unifies “the كَوْنٌ of the heaven” and “the كَوْنٌ of this world”, I would not differ from these commentators just as they do not actually differ from one another in its interpretation. The only difference would be that they have generalized its meaning by including the water channel or the fountain of paradise as well as everything which can be termed as “immense good” like the Qur’ān, wisdom, Islam, and prophethood in its connotations, which actually have no similarity with the water channel or the pond of paradise. I would only include those things in “the كَوْنٌ of this world” which are similar in appearance to a water channel or a pond, whose reality and spiritual aspects were revealed to the Prophet (sws) during the holy ascension.

2. Farāhī, *Majmū‘ah-i tafāsīr*, 418.

3. This refers to the interpretation of Imām Rāzī and that of some others which Imam Farāhī has cited in his exegesis.

After this introduction, Imam Farāhī elaborates on the points which support his deduction. He says:⁴

(1) It is an acknowledged fact that there is a natural desire and inclination in our souls to seek the Almighty. Without this, the human soul cannot receive comfort and assurance. It is this very aspect of human nature which is the cause of various religions Consider then what else can be a better symbol for this natural yearning and eagerness than thirst? In the Psalms of David (sws), this symbolic expression is repeatedly used. If this is correct, then think about the devotees who gather round the Baytullāh during the days of *hajj*, overwhelmed with the feelings of fondness and desire. Don't they seem like people who have an intense craving for thirst and have assembled around a pond to satisfy this longing? If this similarity is evident, then, it would mean that the Baytullāh actually stands for them as the pond of كَوْتَر where they will gather on the Day of Judgement.

(2) The Prophet (sws) has compared our mosques to water channels. According to the Ṣaḥīḥ of Bukhārī:

أَرَأَيْتُمْ لَوْ أَنَّ نَهْرًا بِبَابِ أَحَدِكُمْ يَغْتَسِلُ فِيهِ كُلُّ يَوْمٍ خَمْسًا

Consider if someone among you has a water channel at his door in which he has a bath five times everyday; will he remain dirty?⁵

The basic constituent of this parable also, is water. It not only quenches our thirst but also cleanses us spiritually as well as physically. It is well known that the Baytullāh is the fountainhead of all our prayers. On this basis, our mosques are indeed like the water canals of this pond, through which we cleanse ourselves spiritually.

(3) Just as the congregation of *hajj* depicts the abundance of the Muslim *ummah* in relation to people of other religions, likewise, their assembly at the pond of كَوْتَر also will stand for their multitude, as is evident from certain Aḥādīth. The best possible way in which this great number could have been depicted was to hold their congregation at a specific place. By this gathering, other nations of the world estimate that what is present at the Baytullāh is only a meagre yet vibrant drop of the boundless expanse of water spread all

4. Farāhī, *Majmū'ah-i tafāsīr*, 419-420.

5. Al-Bukhārī, *Al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 1, 197, (no. 505).

over the earth. So just as the gathering of the Muslim *ummah* at the pond of **كَوْتَر** will depict their abundance in relation to the people of other prophets, likewise their assembly at the Baytullah during *hajj* portrays their abundance. Consider how aptly the word **كَوْتَر** relates the two congregations.

(4) The Prophet (sws) is reported to have said that he would recognise his people at the pond of **كَوْتَر** through the traces of water by which they performed ablutions. It is an allusion to the fact that only those who pay visit to the Baytullāh with a pure and sincere heart would be present in the next world around his pond, which is actually the reality of this House.

(5) The Almighty made the conquest of Makkah the cause for the increase in magnitude of the Muslim *ummah*; therefore, after the Prophet's *hajj* people accepted faith in large numbers.

(6) Like, the fountain of **كَوْتَر**, the Almighty has also called the Baytullāh a blessed place. The Qur'ān says:

إِنَّ أَوَّلَ بَيْتٍ وُضِعَ لِلنَّاسِ لَلَّذِي بِبَكَّةَ مُبَارَكًا وَهُدًى لِّلْعَالَمِينَ (٣: ٩٦)

Indeed, the first house ever built for men in which they could worship was that at Bakkah, a blessed place, a beacon for the nations. (3:96)

I have just briefly referred to Imam Farāhī's views. For details, a study of his exegesis is necessary. He goes on to explain that the channel of **كَوْتَر** is the true essence and spiritual reality of the Baytullāh and its surroundings. He writes:⁶

If anyone reflects on the features and characteristics of the channel of **كَوْتَر** which was shown to the Prophet (sws) during the holy ascension, he will become aware of the fact that the channel of **كَوْتَر** is the spiritual manifestation of the Baytullāh and its surrounding atmosphere. The common element in the various Ahādīth which describe **كَوْتَر** is that it is a water channel on whose sides are built palaces of hollow pearls. Its floor is of topazes, corals and rubies. The utensils in it are like stars of the heavens, its water is whiter than milk, sweeter than honey and cooler than ice. Its mud is more fragrant than musk. Birds whose necks are like those of the animals

6. Ibid., 421-422.

of sacrifice descend on it.

As we move further in his exegesis, Imam Farāhī, invites us to contemplate on these observations and explains the similarity between the two “Ponds of كَوْتَر”. He says:⁷

Stop for a moment and think of the fact when from all over the world caravans of devotees and zealots gather around this blessed House to quench their fondness for the Almighty? Elated spiritually, do not the pebbles of this holy valley seem more magnificent than rubies and emeralds, its mud more fragrant than musk and the tents of the pilgrims around it more beautiful than domes of pearls? Then just take a look at the pilgrims and at the lines of the camels which are to be sacrificed. Are these not the swarms of the long necked birds near the fountain?

It is evident from these details that the Baytullāh is a figurative manifestation of the pond of كَوْتَر. The Baytullāh will be granted to the believers in heaven in the form of the pond of كَوْتَر – believers who offered its pilgrimage in the desire to reach this blessed pond. Since, at the time of revelation of the sūrah the situation was not clear, only a reference has been made. The real purpose was to give glad tidings to the Prophet (sws) that though his enemies are trying to dislodge him from the Baytullāh, the Almighty has decided to grant this House to him, which not only will be a source of immense good for him in this world but will also be a surety for the pond of كَوْتَر in the next.

فَصَلِّ لِرَبِّكَ وَانْحَرْ⁸

The verse states that the grant of the Almighty mentioned in the previous verse is subject to a condition. Every right imposes an obligation and it only remains in force if this obligation is fulfilled. It has already been indicated before that the Almighty had consigned the Baytullāh to the Quraysh imposing a lot of responsibilities on them. Among them prayer and *infāq* (which is a specific form of sacrifice) occupy special importance. But the Quraysh had distorted and disfigured both of them. They had corrupted sacrifice by associating other deities with Allah and offering sacrifice for them as well. So here, where the Prophet (sws) is declared as the new guardian of the Baytullāh, a reference has also been made to the two responsibilities his predecessors

7. Ibid. 422.

8. So pray only for your Almighty

had grossly failed to carry out and because of which they had actually been ousted from its guardianship.

The word نَحْر (nahr) has been used in the verse which signifies camel sacrifice. However, its general connotation includes the sacrifice of other animals as well. Here this particular word has been specifically used to point out that camel sacrifice was regarded very highly among the followers of Abraham's creed, which the Jews, due to their innovations had pronounced as forbidden. Some people regard نَحْر to imply the holding of hands at one's chest during the prayer. However, the context, which is a major factor in deciding the meaning of a word having various connotations, does not at all support this view. Prayer and sacrifice are aptly mentioned here because the word كَوْنُر is figuratively used for the Baytullāh.

At most places in the Qur'ān, zakāh or infāq are mentioned adjacent to ṣalāh (the prayer), but in this verse sacrifice is grouped with ṣalāh. The reason obviously is that just like that of ṣalāh, the Baytullāh is also the centre of sacrifice. A special aspect of this sacrifice is that not only the poor and needy but the pilgrims as well are provided with food. In other words, besides fulfilling other spiritual objectives, this sacrifice is also a form of infāq.

إِنَّ شَانِئَكَ هُوَ الْأَبْتَرُ⁹

This verse is an answer to the jeering predictions of the Quraysh chiefs about the Prophet's future. After giving him the glad tidings of being blessed with the كَوْنُر of the two worlds and after stating the responsibilities these privileges impose, the Almighty has reassured the Prophet (sws) about the bright future of his message in this world as well as his success in the Hereafter. The Qur'ān says that the Prophet's enemies themselves shall be uprooted from the land – something they intended to do with the Prophet (sws) and his companions. شَانِي means "enemy" while أَبْتَر implies a person who is lost to posterity after death and leaves behind no one to even take his name.

The Quraysh were opposing and obstructing the Prophet's mission with all their might in Makkah, but in its whereabouts, particularly, Madīnah this mission was gaining momentum and spreading rapidly. The Quraysh chiefs, quite naturally, felt that their masses would be influenced by this swift penetration and might seriously believe in the severe warnings sounded by the Qur'ān to the leaders of the Quraysh, particularly the Baytullāh's custodians. They feared that this might shatter their public's confidence in their leadership; their sympathies

9. Indeed, your enemy shall be severed.

might tilt in the Prophet's favour and not only strengthen his mission but also make them accept him as their new leader. In order to avert this situation, they began predicting a disappointing and bleak future for the Prophet (sws) so that their people would not be awed by the fact that the Islamic movement was gaining force day by day. They made up different stories in his regard. Seeing the inclinations of the Anṣār towards him, they propagated in the masses the view that owing to his new religion this person has been detached from his nation and the centre of his old religion (the Baytullāh), and that if he now takes refuge in Madīnah with the Anṣār, cutting off himself from the Quraysh, he would be like a severed branch of a tree which is bound to wither away. In the time before the *hijrah*, it was generally held by the people of Arabia that if the Prophet (sws) would leave Makkah and his people, he would go to the Anṣār, because only they were in a position to help and support him. On this very pretext, the Quraysh had even warned certain tribes of the Anṣār, who had come to Makkah to pledge their allegiance, that their oath would definitely entail war with the whole world. But these threats had had no effect on the Anṣār and their devotion and respect for Islam and the Prophet (sws) only augmented day by day. Seeing this state of affairs, the Quraysh were left with no hope of success in the propaganda they had started – but then what else could they do except sowing seeds of dissension. Both, before and after the migration, they tried to dupe their public that it would prove disastrous for the Prophet (sws) and his mission would fade away. However, it was the prediction of the Qur'ān which ultimately came true and the enemies of the Prophet (sws) were totally routed. He reaped the blessings of the كَوْنٌ of this world, and he will certainly be the foremost to reach the كَوْنٌ of heaven to behold the abundance of his *ummah*.

Sūrah Kāfirūn

Central Theme, Relationship with Preceding Sūrah and Sequence in the Subject Matter

The Prophet (sws) has declared acquittal from the die-hard leaders of the disbelievers of the Quraysh in this *sūrah*. In all the previous *sūrahs*, leaders of the Quraysh are addressed; however, the address is in their capacity of human beings and as the nation of the Prophet (sws). Nowhere are they addressed in the tone: قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا الْكَافِرُونَ (Say: O Disbelievers!) However, in this *sūrah*, they are openly addressed as disbelievers and a declaration of acquittal and severing of ties is made. This declaration is in accordance with the law of the Almighty regarding His Messengers, as is explained in the previous *sūrahs*: Messengers first call their people towards the primary aspects of religion which are belief in monotheism and in the Hereafter. In this preaching, they address their people by saying “O my People!” and keep addressing them in these words as long as the pundits and leaders among their people do not make them lose hope. When all hope is lost from them and it becomes evident that they will not let go of their stubbornness, the Almighty directs His Messenger to migrate from them who then pronounces his acquittal and renunciation from them and migrates with his followers. The migration of a Messenger is like a very final warning for his people. If, after this event also, they do not mend their ways, the Almighty after giving them limited respite destroys all the blatant rejecters. This destruction may take place in the life of a Messenger or it may take place after him; it may also happen through some natural calamity or through the swords of the followers of the Messengers. This is a common feature in the preaching mission of all Messengers from Noah (sws) to Abraham (sws) and then right up to Muḥammad (sws) and is evident from the history of all these Messengers recorded in the Qur’ān. We have been alluding to its various aspects.

The address of يَا أَيُّهَا الْكَافِرُونَ (O you Disbelievers!) is obviously directed at the die-hard leaders of the Quraysh who were at the forefront in opposing the Prophet (sws). Their continuous opposition and animosity had made it clear that this opposition was not based on any doubt or confusion but was in fact because of their conceit in their ancestral leadership that had made them so blind that except for God’s

punishment nothing could have shook them. It is because of this mentality of the addressees that whatever is said in the *sūrah* is said in a very blatant manner and everything said is based on reality. People who think that the address by the words يَا أَيُّهَا الْكَافِرُونَ (O you Disbelievers!) is meant to censure them or to express anger at them are mistaken. In reality, the disbelief (*kufr*) of a group never becomes evident unless the people on the right path communicate the truth to them to such an extent that they are left with no excuse to deny it. It is only after this that their disbelief becomes obvious and it is only after this is it allowed that those on the right path should declare their acquittal from them and if, a need arises, even to declare holy war (*jihād*) on them. The Messengers of God have undertaken migration and launched offensives only after the truth has been communicated to their addressees to such an extent and it is this what justice entails.

This *sūrah* also ended all possibilities of any sort of compromise regarding religion with the leaders of the Quraysh. Hence this *sūrah* is not merely the *sūrah* of migration, it is practically a declaration of war with them. It is evident from our explanation of the following verse of Sūrah Yūnus¹ that the leaders of the Quraysh had suggested to the Prophet (sws) that if he wanted them to embrace faith, then the only possible option was to either bring another Qur'ān or to make some changes in it which were acceptable to them (١٥:١٠) اْتِ بِقُرْآنٍ غَيْرِ هَذَا أَوْ بَدِّلْهُ (Bring some other Qur'ān, or change it, (10:15))

We have written there that it is evident from various insinuations of the Qur'ān that the greatest objection which the leaders of the Quraysh had was on the Qur'ānic teaching of monotheism and they stressed that a change be made in it. They regarded it to be against their ancestral beliefs and feared that if they rejected all gods except God as required by the Qur'ān then this would ruin their political position. The answer to this demand of theirs was given from the Prophet (sws) in the words (١٥:١٠) قُلْ مَا يَكُونُ لِي أَنْ أَبَدِّلَهُ مِنْ تَلَقَّاءِ نَفْسِي (Tell them: "What right have I to change it of my own," (10:15)). This answer was despairing for the Quraysh, yet it was not decisive. However, in this *sūrah*, they have been answered in such a decisive and ultimate manner that the matter stood closed. In other words, this meant that no possibility of any compromise remained and if the Quraysh persisted with their stubbornness, they would have to face the swords of the believers.

The fact that this *sūrah* is placed right after Sūrah Kawthar also has great meaningfulness. It is evident from the explanation of Sūrah Kawthar that

1. Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥī, *Tadabbur-i Qur'ān*, vol. 3, 282.

the *sūrah* is actually a harbinger to the conquest of Makkah, which in other words means that before the *sūrah* which directs the Prophet (sws) to migrate and launch *jihād*, another *sūrah* had already given him the glad tidings of triumph and divine help. This was to assure him and his Companions (rta) that though they would have to go through the hardships of migration and war, they would be victorious in the end. The Almighty has already decided that He will bless His Prophet with success and victory and he and his Companions (rta) would be granted both the Kawthar of this world² and of the next³. Such glad tidings have also been given to the Prophet (sws) in the supplication of migration mentioned in Sūrah Banī Isrā'īl in the following words: وَقُلْ رَبِّ أَدْخِلْنِي مُدْخَلَ صِدْقٍ وَأُخْرِجْنِي مُخْرَجَ صِدْقٍ (٨٠:١٧) (Pray: "Lord, grant me an honourable entrance and an honourable exit." (17:80)). A little deliberation on the contents of this supplication shows that the Almighty has given the Prophet (sws) glad tidings in an invocatory style: although his time of leaving Makkah is drawing near yet even before this departure the Almighty has arranged for him a grand entry to the place of migration.

In short, in this *sūrah*, the message is given from the tongue of the Prophet (sws) to the leaders of the Quraysh that there is no common ground between him and them regarding the basic issue of religion: the God who is to be worshipped. This common ground neither exists at that time nor did it exist in the past and nor is there any possibility of it in the future; hence, there no longer is a chance of any compromise between him and them; they should follow their religion and the Prophet (sws) and his followers should follow theirs until the judgement of God arrives.

Text and Translation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا الْكَافِرُونَ (١) لَا أَعْبُدُ مَا تَعْبُدُونَ (٢) وَلَا أَنْتُمْ عَابِدُونَ مَا أَعْبُدُ (٣) وَلَا أَنَا
عَابِدٌ مَّا عَبَدْتُمْ (٤) وَلَا أَنْتُمْ عَابِدُونَ مَا أَعْبُدُ (٥) لَكُمْ دِينُكُمْ وَلِيَ دِينِ (٦)

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Ever Merciful

Say: "O Disbelievers! I shall not worship that which you worship. Nor will you ever worship that which I worship. Nor did I worship that which you worshipped. Nor did you ever worship that which I have been worshipping. (1-5)

To you your religion and to me mine." (6)

2. ie., the Baytullāh.

3. Ie. the Fountain of Kawthar.

Explanation

قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا الْكَافِرُونَ⁴⁽¹⁾

The imperative verb قُلْ here means “to declare”. It is used in this meaning in the Qur’ān. The subject matter of this *sūrah* required a declaration so that people who were obsessed with the desire of striking a compromise between Islam and disbelief should lose hope in this strategy which was destined to fail. Such a declaration was also required so that the simpletons who regarded people who put forward such suggestions to be peace-lovers and reconciliation activists know the real truth; they should know that this was not the path of peace; it was the path of ever-increasing disorder.

The words يَا أَيُّهَا الْكَافِرُونَ are directed at the leaders of the Quraysh who had denied the truth and who were the foremost addressees of the Prophet (sws). After years of preaching efforts from the Prophet (sws) the change that did come in them was that they demanded an amalgam of Islam and disbelief. It should be kept in mind that a Messenger is a means of communicating the truth in such an ultimate form to his addressees that they are left with no legitimate excuse to deny it. If his efforts are unable to influence them, then it only means that nothing can change and reform them. Consequently, the hopelessness expressed about these people further down in the *sūrah* came absolutely true. None of them embraced Islam and became a prey to his own ego and pride.

Two questions arise here about the nature of this address. One of them is that generally the Qur’ān has not addressed the Quraysh in such a harsh tone; what then is the characteristic of this *sūrah* that they have been addressed by the words يَا أَيُّهَا الْكَافِرُونَ. The second question which arises is that the Quraysh and in fact the Arabs in general did not deny God; they associated partners with Him. Why then did the Qur’ān address them as Disbelievers and why did it not address them as Idolaters.

Although we have answered this question at various places in this exegesis and also indicated it in the introduction of this *sūrah*, we allude to the answer here once again.

The answer to the first question is that this address was adopted by the Prophet (sws) only after he had lost hope in them and migrated from them after communicating the truth to them in such an ultimate manner that they were left with no excuse to deny it. The Almighty directs His Messenger to migrate only when it becomes evident from the behaviour of his people that they are not left with any ability to accept faith and their arrogance has

4. Say: O Disbelievers!

reached such an extent that if they are further pressed they might, God forbid, kill the Messenger. At this instance, it seems absolutely appropriate that a Messenger after declaring his despair and hopelessness from his people and their deities separate from them. Since the preaching of a Messenger has served the purpose of explaining at length both Islam and disbelief, therefore it becomes crystal clear that anyone who adopts either of them does not do so in ignorance. Consequently, at this stage, if he addresses people who have chosen to adhere to disbelief as “O Disbelievers!”, then this address is very apt and pertinent.

A teaching which becomes evident for us from this explanation is that although it is the responsibility of every Muslim to call anything which is polytheistic or comes under the ambit of disbelief as polytheistic and disbelief; however declaring some group as *kāfir* and renouncing it or severing ties from it or declaring *jihād* against it is a matter which requires great caution. In particular, the case of those people who regard their erroneous views to be nothing but Islam is very complex. This is further complicated when no system exists to preach them what true Islam is. In such circumstances, the right path is that a person should criticize their erroneous and deviant views and also distance himself from participating in their activities which are afflicted with polytheistic practices and religious innovations; however, he should not declare them to be *kāfir* and announce his acquittal from them unless he is compelled to do so or unless sound reasons come before him which show that he has communicated the truth to them. This last thing is very difficult.

The answer to the second question is that polytheism (*shirk*) is in fact disbelief (*kufr*). Only that faith is acceptable in religion which comes with complete monotheistic attitudes. This means that a person should not associate anyone with God's being, attributes and rights in any way. The Almighty is in no need of the faith and worship of anyone so that He has to accept every type of faith and every type of worship even though it is contaminated with polytheism. He requires His servants to worship Him on His own prescribed conditions not on those of others. Hence every deed which is not done purely and solely for Him is not acceptable to Him. As per the philosophy of the Qur'ān, there is no difference between a person who denies God and a person who believes in God but also believes in others besides Him either as His equals or as His subordinates. Both these persons are in fact rejecters of God and, in other words, are *kāfir*. The reason for this is that professing belief in God whilst indulging in polytheism is a negation of all His higher attributes and professing faith in such a manner is equivalent to not professing faith in Him. The Qur'ān, whilst addressing these polytheists as disbelievers has revealed that polytheism is in fact disbelief; no one should be

mistaken that it is something lesser than disbelief or that it can be in anyway shown consideration.

لَا أَعْبُدُ مَا تَعْبُدُونَ⁵

This verse addresses the pundits among the disbelievers of the Qurasyh and answers their proposal of striking a mutual compromise. In other words, their hopes have been shattered to pieces in the very first sentence.

Generally, people have taken لَا أَعْبُدُ in the present tense. Zamakhsharī⁶ is of the view that this is against the linguistic principles of Arabic and I agree with him. When the particle لَا is appended to a verb in the continuous tense (مُضارع) in this manner, it necessarily transforms its meaning into the future tense. If a verb in the continuous tense is to be taken in the present tense, then the particle of negation which is appropriate is مَا instead of لَا.

Moreover, negating or affirming something in the present tense has not much use. Everyone among the Quraysh knew that the Prophet (sws) does not worship any of their idols. In such a situation, what use was there to tell them that the Prophet (sws) does not worship what they worship. Their basic objective of presenting the compromise formula was that the Prophet (sws) should show some lenience in his attitude in which there was no possibility of the existence of other deities. If anything could have shattered there hopes, it had to be the emphatic statement that in future too he would not show any lenience in the matter of monotheism.

We have written in the *tafsīr* of the verse⁷: وَدُّوا لَوْ تُدْهِنُ فَيُدْهِنُونَ (٦٨: ٩) (They desire that you be flexible, then they will also be flexible, (68:9)) that after going to the extent of persecution and oppression of the Muslims, the Quraysh had got a fair idea just before migration that they would not be able to stop the ever-increasing force of Islam. The only option left was to pressurize the Prophet (sws) and force him to settle affairs on the principle of “give and take”. This meant that just as they accept a position for the Almighty, the Prophet (sws) should also accept a position for their idols and this compromise would end the dispute. They were hopeful that by pressurizing the Prophet (sws), they would make him accept their stance. They thus exercised all their power to achieve this goal and the situation reached the extent that the Prophet (sws) and His Companions (rta) were forced to migrate. Since

5. I shall worship not that which you worship

6. Zamakhsharī, *Kashshāf*, vol. 4 (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, n.d.), 807.

7. Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāhī, *Tadabbur-i Qur’ān*, vol. 8, 516.

monotheism is the foundation of Islam, going through the trial of migration was tolerated; however, no flexibility was tolerated in the belief of monotheism and it was openly declared: لَا أُعْبُدُ مَا تَعْبُدُونَ (I shall worship not that which you worship).

وَلَا أَنْتُمْ عَابِدُونَ مَا أَعْبُدُ⁸(٣)

At the same time, the Prophet (sws) also informed his opponents of the bare fact that if they think that they worship or will become the worshippers of the God he worships, then this is a mere thought on their part. The basic condition of serving and worshipping God is that only He be served and worshipped and no one else should have any position in this regard. If they are not willing to give up their deities, they cannot become His worshippers. It is their misconception that they regard themselves to be worshippers of the Almighty. Worshipping other deities besides God cannot be tolerated. If they are to serve Him, then it is essential that they leave serving others. If they combine their worship with His worship, they would definitely be regarded as worshippers of these deities; however, they will have no share in worshipping the Almighty.

The expression مَا تَعْبُدُونَ used in the previous verse is absolutely appropriate for the deities of the Idolaters because they worship imaginary and made-up deities; however, a question does arise about the expression مَا أَعْبُدُ used for the Almighty.⁹ The answer to this question is that it is used thus on the principle of *mujānisah*, which is very common in the Arabic language and in the Qur'ān.¹⁰ For example: دَنَّاهُمْ كَمَا دَانُوا (We dealt with them the way they dealt [with us]) and جَزَاءُ سَيِّئَةٍ سَيِّئَةٌ مِثْلُهَا (٤٠:٤٢) (The recompense of evil is similar evil. (42:40)).¹¹ We have already elaborated on this style earlier.¹²

8. Nor will you ever worship that which I worship

9. The question arises because of the particle مَا which in contrast to مَنْ is used for inanimate things. (Translator)

10. *mujānasah* means using similar words or expression such that the second used word or expression does not do the job of conveying its original meaning but rather is of the same genre and category as the previous one. (Translator)

11. In the first of these examples, as clarified by Islāhī elsewhere (see: footnote 8) the words: دَنَّاهُمْ كَمَا actually is in the meaning of: كَمَا فَعَلُوا (the way they did). دَنَّاهُمْ has only come to express *mujānasah* with دَنَّاهُمْ. In the second example, the word evil used second is merely for *mujānasah* as well. Of course, the reward of evil is not a similar evil for the reward is a just act which the perpetrator of evil deserves; this act of justice cannot be called evil in the literal sense. (Translator)

12. Amīn Aḥsan Islāhī, *Tadabbur-i Qur'ān*, vol. 7, 181.

وَلَا أَنَا عَابِدٌ مَّا عَبَدْتُمْ (٤)¹³

The previous declaration related to the future. Here, in this verse, the Prophet (sws) has unequivocally stated that in the past also he never worshipped what the Idolaters worshipped. Zamakhsharī¹⁴ has also interpreted this verse in this manner. I find it to be correct both linguistically and with respect to the context of the verse.

The sentence وَلَا أَنَا عَابِدٌ is a noun sentence and therefore does not have a tense. In other words, it is not in the past or present or future tense and is, in fact, in its absolute form and can be related to any of these tenses in the presence of some indication. Here since مَّا عَبَدْتُمْ is in the past tense hence on the basis of this explicit indication the negation in وَلَا أَنَا عَابِدٌ also relates to the past. The meaning being: “In the past also, I did not worship what you worshipped.”

This sentence increases the intensity of the declaration of acquittal made in the previous verse. The implication would be that when the Prophet (sws) did not even consider worshipping the deities of the Idolaters even before he was blessed with prophethood and with the radiance of divine revelation, how can he now go astray by worshipping them when he is directly receiving guidance from God. In other words, if there had been even a single period in his life in which he subscribed to polytheism, they could expect that he may get convinced to adopt it again. But when even in the age of *jāhilliyah*, he was not contaminated with the filth of polytheism, how can they now expect this from him.

وَلَا أَنتُمْ عَابِدُونَ مَّا أَعْبُدُ (٥)¹⁵

This verse has the same words as verse three and thus seems a repetition; however, it has a different meaning. Like verse four, it relates to the past whereas, as explained earlier, verse three is related to the future. In other words, the leaders of the Quraysh are informed that if they are under the misconception that in the past also they have been worshipping the God whom the Prophet (sws) has been worshipping, then this is an absolutely false notion. As has been explained earlier, worshipping God whilst associating partners with Him, is like not worshipping Him and these leaders have never ever given up worshipping other deities besides God; hence neither does the Prophet (sws) belong to their religious fraternity nor do they belong to his religious fraternity; so how do they expect that they would be able to

13. Nor did I worship that which you worshipped

14. Zamakhsharī, *Kashshāf*, vol. 4 (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, n.d.), 808.

15. Nor did you ever worship that which I have been worshipping

make the Prophet (sws) join their religious fraternity whilst being contaminated with the filth of polytheism.

An obvious question which arises on our interpretation of the verse is that why have the words مَا أَعْبُدُ been used instead of مَا عَبَدْتُ?¹⁶ One answer to this is given by Zamakhsharī¹⁷ that the words مَا عَبَدْتُ have not been said because in that period the Prophet (sws) did not worship God; so he did not give its reference but only referred to his present. However, this answer is absolutely wrong. Prophets of God are sound embodiments of human nature even before they are assigned prophethood and since monotheism is the religion of human nature, they are never incriminated with polytheism which is against human nature. Moreover, they always worship the Almighty in some form or another even though they might have exercised their own opinion in determining this form or deduced it from the previously existing tradition of religion. The Prophet (sws) used to worship God before being given the responsibility of prophethood although we do not have a clear picture of the form in which he worshipped. However, what is known is that it was based on the *hanīfiyyat* whose tradition continued to exist in the Arabian society ever since the times of the prophets Abraham (sws) and Ishmael (sws). Thus, in our opinion, the reason cited by Zamakhsharī for not saying مَا عَبَدْتُ is not correct. The correct reason for this is that the Prophet (sws) did not worship the Almighty merely in the past; the fact of the matter is that just as he worshipped the Almighty in the past, he adhered to worshipping Him in the present also. The words مَا أَعْبُدُ actually express in the past continuous tense the continuity of his worship extending from the past to the present.¹⁸ The implication is that his addressees did not worship in the past the God who was worshipped by him not only in the past but also in the present.

لَكُمْ دِينُكُمْ وَلِيَ دِينِ (٦)¹⁹

The implication of this verse is that when there was no commonality between the religion of the Prophet (sws) in past nor in the present, how do they expect that all of them will agree on one opinion; hence there is no use expecting a compromise; to the Prophet (sws) belongs his religion and to them theirs; he will work according to his way and they should

16. This question arises because of the past tense in مَا عَبَدْتُ. (Translator)

17. Zamakhsharī, *Kashshāf*, vol. 4 (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, n.d.), 809.

18. Iṣlāhī is referring to the fact that مَا أَعْبُدُ is actually أَعْبُدُ مَا كُنْتُ; there being an ellipsis of the incomplete verb كُنْتُ. (Translator).

19. To you your religion and to me mine!

according to theirs and wait whether the Prophet (sws) is proven correct or they.

A similar declaration is made in the verse: قُلْ يَا قَوْمِ اعْمَلُوا عَلَىٰ مَكَانَتِكُمْ إِنِّي عَامِلٌ (۱۳۵:۶) (Tell them: “O People! Do what you are at your place and I will do what I am at my place”, (6:135)). In 11:93 and 39:39,²⁰ also this declaration is cited with reference to some other Messengers and the objective is to close doors to the discussion and debate initiated by the enemies of the Prophet (sws) to convince him to accept their views. With this declaration he gave them his final verdict that neither is he willing to shift from his religion in the slightest way nor is he willing to accept in anyway their religion.

Generally, people have regarded this verse to be an expression of tolerance. However, this verse actually expresses disgust at the attitude of the disbelievers and in fact is an expression of permanent severing of ties from them and a declaration of war. In short, this is the same declaration which Abraham (sws) made before his followers, which the Qur’ān has mentioned thus:

قَدْ كَانَتْ لَكُمْ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ فِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَالَّذِينَ مَعَهُ إِذْ قَالُوا لِقَوْمِهِمْ إِنَّا بُرَاءُ مِنْكُمْ وَمِمَّا تَعْبُدُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ كَفَرْنَا بِكُمْ وَبَدَا بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمُ الْعَدَاوَةُ وَالْبَغْضَاءُ أَبَدًا حَتَّىٰ تُؤْمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَحَدَهُ (۴:۶۰)

You have the best example in Abraham and those who followed him. Remember when they said to their people: “We disown you and the idols which you worship besides God. We renounce you and enmity and hate shall reign between us until you believe in the one and only

20. The words of the verses are:

وَيَا قَوْمِ اعْمَلُوا عَلَىٰ مَكَانَتِكُمْ إِنِّي عَامِلٌ سَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ مَنْ يَأْتِيهِ عَذَابٌ يُخْزِيهِ وَمَنْ هُوَ كَاذِبٌ وَارْتَقِبُوا إِنِّي مَعَكُمْ رَقِيبٌ (۹۳:۱۱)

He said: “My people! keep doing what you are doing and I will what I am doing. Soon you shall know upon whom the humiliating scourge comes and [soon you shall know] who is the liar and wait and I will also wait with you.” (11:93)

قُلْ يَا قَوْمِ اعْمَلُوا عَلَىٰ مَكَانَتِكُمْ إِنِّي عَامِلٌ فَسَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ مَنْ يَأْتِيهِ عَذَابٌ يُخْزِيهِ (۳۹:۳۹)
Tell [them]: “Do what you are doing in the way you are and I will do what I am doing in the way I am. You shall soon know who will be seized by a scourge.” (39:39)

God.” (60:4)

The example of Abraham (sws) and his followers has only been presented before the Prophet (sws) so that he and his followers too make such a declaration of renunciation from their people. Thus it was whilst following this example that the Prophet (sws) made this declaration. So how can tolerance be construed from it. If the context and sequence of a discourse is not kept in consideration, a great inadequacy that results is that people fail to differentiate between words of disgust and words of tolerance. This verse is a very good example of this failure.

With the blessings of God, on these words ends the commentary of this *sūrah*. وأخر دعوانا أن الحمد لله رب العالمين (And our last words are that all praise is for Allah).

Lahore,
24th June, 1980 AD
10th Sha‘bān, 1400 AH

Sūrah Naṣr

It is explained in the exegesis of Sūrah Kāfirūn, the previous *sūrah* that the *sūrah* is a declaration of migration and acquittal and in fact a proclamation of war. Now, in Sūrah Naṣr glad tidings are given to the Prophet (sws) that the time is near when divine help shall specially come to his rescue, Makkah shall be conquered and he shall successfully complete the mission on which he had been deputed by the Almighty. He shall be pleased and satisfied with him. The opening verses of Sūrah Faṭḥ also portray this subject. I have dealt with it at length there. Those interested may take a look.

I have already referred to the deep relationship which exists between migration, *jihād*, victory and divine help in the exegesis of Sūrah Kāfirūn. Here it would be sufficient if one keeps in mind the fact that when the time of migration comes in the life of the Messengers the truth has been communicated to their people to the extent that they are left with no excuse to deny it. It is at this time when they separate from their people and form an organized group with their followers and it is at this time when their people become devoid of the pious element in them and are no more than a body without the soul. Moreover, at this time, the believers become an unconquerable force by being able to freely adhere to their ideology that whoever attacks them is vanquished and whoever is attacked by them is decimated. Thus whenever Messengers have declared war on their enemies, it is after migration from their people and although during this war they have been put through trials for their own training, the help of God blesses them with a victory no one can dare challenge. The various incidents in the life of Moses (sws) and Muḥammad (sws) bear ample testimony to this.

It is because of this relationship between migration and victory through divine help that this *sūrah*, unanimously regarded as Madīnan, was deemed appropriate to pair a Makkan Sūrah. There are two opinions about the time of revelation of this *sūrah*. One is that it was the very last of *sūrahs* revealed after the conquest of Makkah and the second is that it was revealed before this conquest giving glad tidings of it. I would prefer the second of these.

The reason for this is evident from the Qur'ān and from various sayings attributed to the Prophet (sws) that since he was to follow the

religion of Abraham (sws) and since the real centre of this religion was the Baytullāh, hence liberating it from people who violated its trust and endowing it with the characteristics of the religion of Abraham (sws) was the final and real mission of the Prophet (sws). This has been spelled out in the verses: **الْيَوْمَ أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ وَأَتِمَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَتِي وَرَضِيتُ لَكُمُ الْإِسْلَامَ دِينًا** (3:5) (This day I have completed your religion for you and fulfilled My favour on you and have chosen Islam to be your religion. (5:3)). Whatever else was achieved besides this were actually its by-products and corollaries.

The second reason was that the Quraysh were the real force in Arabia who were at the helm of affairs of Makkah and since they were the custodians of the Baytullāh, they commanded the awe and respect of all Arabia. To break the shackles of their power was real victory. Without breaking these shackles, no victory could be counted as real victory nor, once these were broken, was there any possibility left for anyone to combat the onslaught of the Muslims.

The third reason is that the help and victory mentioned in this *sūrah* and the way they came are no ordinary help and victory; they are the help and victory cherished by the hearts of Muslim and which they eagerly desired after migration for they were a consequence of the promise of the Almighty and His Prophet (sws) and in accordance with the established practice of God. This help is the help mentioned in Sūrah Mujādalah in the following words: **كَتَبَ اللَّهُ لَأَغْلِبَنَّ أَنَا وَرُسُلِي** (58:21) (The Almighty has ordained: "I and My Messengers shall always prevail," (58:20-21)) and this very victory and help is mentioned in Sūrah Şaff thus: **وَأُخْرَىٰ تُحِبُّونَهَا نَصْرٌ مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَفَتْحٌ قَرِيبٌ** (13:61) (And another success also which you hold dear: the help of God and imminent victory, (61:13)). It is obvious that the victory and help mentioned in this *sūrah* is the conquest of Makkah and there is no possibility of it referring to some other victory. People who are of the opinion that the *sūrah* was revealed after the conquest of Makkah have misunderstood a narrative. However, it is not possible to discuss this in detail here and, perhaps, a careful reading of what I have written here does not even require such a discussion.

Glad tidings of decisive help pervade the mood of the *sūrah* – glad tidings of the liberation of Makkah and glad tidings of people entering the folds of Islam in multitudes and finally glad tidings of the success and of the Prophet (sws) in his mission. From this last glad tidings, it becomes self-evident that the time of the Prophet's death is also near. For this reason, he should spend even more time in celebrating the praises of God and in expressing His exaltedness so that he is able to

express his gratitude on the great favour of completion of religion bestowed upon him by the Almighty and so that he is blessed with even more favours by his forgiving Lord. It was from this part of the *sūrah* that the greatest scholar of the Qur'ān, 'Abdullāh Ibn 'Abbās (rta) derived that the Prophet's death was at hand. No doubt this was a subtle inference and the greatest testimony to this subtlety was that 'Umar (rta) too praised and corroborated it. However, this particular aspect also stores great news for the Prophet (sws) and I shall explain it during the course of the exegesis of this *sūrah*.

Text and Translation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
 إِذَا جَاءَ نَصْرُ اللَّهِ وَالْفَتْحُ (١) وَرَأَيْتَ النَّاسَ يَدْخُلُونَ فِي دِينِ اللَّهِ أَفْوَاجًا (٢) فَسَبِّحْ
 بِحَمْدِ رَبِّكَ وَاسْتَغْفِرْهُ إِنَّهُ كَانَ تَوَّابًا (٣)

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Ever Merciful

When the help of God and the victory comes and you see men embrace the religion of God in multitudes, extol the glory of your Lord while expressing gratitude to Him and seek His forgiveness. Indeed, He is ever disposed to mercy. (1-3)

Text and Translation

إِذَا جَاءَ نَصْرُ اللَّهِ وَالْفَتْحُ (١)¹

The emphatic and specific way in which the help of God and victory are mentioned here and the way the Prophet (sws) has been asked to exalt and thank the Almighty shows that no ordinary help or victory is mentioned here: in fact, the reference is to the divine help and victory, which, in accordance with the established practice of the Almighty is always ordained for the Messengers of God against their enemies. This help and victory arrives when a Messenger has exhausted all ways of communication in delivering his message to his people and these people on the other hand become adamant in denying him and in showing animosity to him that there is no hope left for any change in their attitude.

In Sūrah Yūsuf, this principle for the arrival of divine help is stated thus: when Messengers of God are left with no hope that their people will embrace faith and the people themselves prove from their very attitude that they regard the warnings of the Messenger delivered to them to be absolutely false and baseless, divine help then appears:

1. When the help of God and the victory comes

حَتَّىٰ إِذَا اسْتَيْأَسَ الرُّسُلُ وَظَنُّوا أَنَّهُمْ قَدْ كُذِّبُوا جَاءَهُمْ نَصْرُنَا (١١:١٢)

Until when the Messengers have no hope from their people to embrace faith and the people think that they are falsely being warned of punishment, then comes Our help to the Messengers. (12:110)

At another place, this principle is stated thus:

فَصَبَرُوا عَلَىٰ مَا كُذِّبُوا وَأُوذُوا حَتَّىٰ أَنَا هُمْ نَصْرُنَا (٣٤:٦)

But they [the Messengers] persevered on being rejected and on being afflicted until Our help came to them. (6:34)

Similarly, the article *alif lām* on the word الْفَتْحُ (the victory) shows that it refers to the promised victory which comes to the Messengers of God and his companions in accordance with His established practice and which has been promised by Him and which is awaited by them even in the toughest periods of their lives. We have already referred to the verses of Sūrah Şaff in which this very victory is mentioned thus: وَأُخْرَىٰ تُحِبُّونَهَا (And another success also which you hold dear: the help of God and imminent victory, (61:13)). At other places of the Qur’ān also, this success and victory have been mentioned in a very terse manner the way it is here; however, since people already knew about it, they found no difficulty in understanding it in spite of the brevity of style. Thus, for example, it is said: لَا يَسْتَوِي مِنْكُمْ مَّنْ أَنْفَقَ مِنْ قَبْلِ الْفَتْحِ وَقَاتِلَ (١٠:٥٧) (The status of those of you who spend and fight in the way of God before the victory and those who do so afterwards would not be equal, (57:10)). Here, one can see, there is no explanation as to which victory is being referred to; however, everyone can understand that the words can only refer to the conquest of Makkah because it could only have been this conquest which could act as a barometer in measuring the extent and value of the deeds of those who were struggling in the way of God. Before the conquest of Makkah, Muslims had achieved victory on numerous occasions and after it also the victories reaped were no less; however, none of them had such a status that minds would immediately grasp that the words “the victory” to only mean the conquest of Makkah. Also, no other victory cast such a profound impact on the collective lives of the Muslims that the value of a virtuous act be measured in relation to the act being done before this victory or after it. After this victory, the whole of Arabia surrendered before Islam in such a profound manner that there remained no possibility for it to rise up again against it. It was

as if with this victory, the real objective of Muḥammad's advent was fulfilled. Consequently, the words of the sermon which the Prophet (sws) delivered after this conquest at the door of the Baytullāh were:

لا إله إلا الله وحده صدق وعده ونصر عبده وهزم الأحزاب وحده

There is no god except the one God. He fulfilled His promise and helped His servant and alone defeated all enemy groups.²

It was after this sermon that the Prophet (sws) turned his attention to the leaders and pundits of the Quraysh who had fought with him with all their might but after this victory were brought as prisoners of war before the Prophet (sws) to await judgement about their fate. The Prophet (sws) asked them: "Do you know what I am going to do with you?" All of them replied in one voice: "You are a noble brother and the son of a noble brother." After hearing this reply, the Prophet (sws) said: "Go now, you are free."³

It is evident from the way divine help and victory are mentioned together in this verse that no one can achieve victory without God's help. Thus it is not befitting for a person to show vanity on his victory and conceitedly think that it was the result of his own strategy and skill. He should regard it to be the result of God's strategy and wisdom. Consequently, this is also evident from the words of the Prophet's sermon for he attributed the defeat and humiliation of all his enemies solely to the power of God. He neither tried to take credit of it himself nor gave credit to anyone else for it. This is also evident from the directive given to him in this *sūrah* to exalt the Almighty and express gratitude before Him because He alone is worthy of being thanked for this great favour and He alone should be exalted and extolled for it.

وَرَأَيْتِ النَّاسَ يَدْخُلُونَ فِي دِينِ اللَّهِ أَفْوَاجًا (٢)⁴

This is the most prominent feature of the victory referred to above. The Prophet's conflict with his tribe was not because of any worldly reason; it was only for the religion of God. He wanted the leaders of the Quraysh to fulfil their obligations towards the House of God because they were its custodians. If they were not ready for this, then they had no right to keep it in their custody nor did they have any right to stop people through

2. Abū Dā'ūd, *Sunan*, vol. 4 (n.p.: Dār al-Fikr, n.d.), 185, (no. 4547).

3. Bayhaqī, *al-Sunan al-Kubrā*, vol. 9 (Makkah: Dār al-Bāz, 1414 AH), 1188, (no. 18055).

4. And you see men embrace the religion of God in multitudes

persecution and coercion from embracing the religion of God. It was to eliminate this religious coercion (called *fitnah* by the Qur'ān) that the Prophet (sws) dislodged the Quraysh from Makkah. Moreover, the only hindrance to people in embracing faith was the wave of intimidation and coercion let loose by the leaders and the commoners had no ill-will against the faith they were being called to. Hence, as soon as the shackles of this duress and oppression were broken, people hastened to accept Islam in multitudes. Before the conquest of Makkah, people who would come to the Prophet (sws) to profess faith would come in fright and fear. Up to that time, even uttering a word of sympathy for Islam was dangerous for people let alone embracing it. We have already mentioned earlier that during that time when certain delegations of the Anṣār came to pledge allegiance to the Prophet (sws), the leaders of Quraysh struck fear in them by saying that this pledge was tantamount to declaring war on both the Arabs and the non-Arabs. Obviously, in the presence of such intimidation and fright, only those people could have had the guts to accept Islam who had the resolve to fight mountains; however, once this atmosphere of coercion was brought to an end, no hindrance remained in accepting faith. Such was the avid manner in which people started to come to Makkah as if they needed to quench their thirst from a spring which provides the water of immortality.

It was this conquest which changed the entire complexion of Arabia to the extent that people were suddenly afforded with the liberty to choose their own religion and the wave of coercion and terror let loose by the Quraysh on the basis of which they had become virtual masters of the faith and destiny of people was brought to an end. Veiled in these glad tidings was the news to the Prophet (sws) that soon the time would come when the people of the Quraysh would rush towards Islam with total freedom from the shackles of the Quraysh. This is a very strong evidence that the victory referred to here is the conquest of Makkah. There is no other victory which produced such results. People who regard this victory to be something other than the conquest of Makkah have not been able to decipher the real message of the *sūrah* neither have they been able to correctly judge the profound effects of the conquest of Makkah.

فَسَبِّحْ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّكَ وَاسْتَغْفِرْهُ إِنَّهُ كَانَ تَوَّابًا (٣)⁵

Many facets are encompassed in this verse; however, two of them are of special importance.

5. Extol His glory while expressing gratitude to Him and seek His forgiveness. Indeed, He is ever disposed to mercy.

Firstly, it guides the Prophet (sws) and his Companions (rta) to the obligation which was imposed on them after this divine help and the conquest of Makkah: instead of showing pride and conceit on this achievement, people should exalt and extol the Almighty, seek forgiveness from Him for their sins with the hope that the Almighty is very Gracious and Noble. He showers His mercy on those among His servants who turn to him in repentance for their sins. It is mentioned in Sūrah Kawthar: (۳-۱: ۱۰۸) وَإِنَّا أَعْطَيْنَاكَ الْكَوْثَرَ فَصَلِّ لِرَبِّكَ وَانْحَرْ (Upon you We have bestowed Kawthar so pray only for God and offer animal sacrifice only for Him, (108:1-2)). In a similar manner, here this verse states the responsibility which is an essential requisite of the victory granted. The verse also guides people to the way which can make this conquest a lasting one. Whatever blessings people are granted by the Almighty necessitate certain responsibilities. As long as people continue to carry out these responsibilities, they remain the recipients of these favours and blessings. When they forget them, the Almighty after giving them some respite either confiscates these favours or puts them through severe trials because of these favours.

Secondly, this verse carries glad tidings for the Prophet (sws): after this victory, he shall have successfully fulfilled the great obligation the Almighty had imposed him. The way the Prophet (sws) drained his strength and set about discharging the responsibility of prophethood imposed on him has been mentioned in the previous *sūrahs*. To have an idea of this tremendous effort put in by him, one only needs to read the following words of Sūrah Tāhah in which the Almighty lovingly rebuked him thus: (۲۰:۲) مَا أَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْكَ الْقُرْآنَ لِتَشْقَى (We have not revealed this Qur'ān that you strain yourself, (20:2)). In this situation, the greatest glad tidings for him could have been nothing but the fact that he be told that a day would come when he shall be relieved of the burden of this responsibility after successfully carrying it out. Consequently, the *sūrah* did give the Prophet (sws) this pleasing news and also evident from the purport of the *sūrah* is that he would successfully accomplish his task. This is because besides asking him to seek forgiveness from the Almighty, he has also been given the glad tidings of God being تَوَّابٌ (*tawwāb*). When this word is used in relation to God, it means that He is very gracious to servants and forgoes their blemishes.

We have already explained many times in this exegesis the nature of blemishes on which the Prophet (sws) has been asked to seek repentance: prophets of God never sin as a result of being led by base desires; their blemishes arise because of some noble motive which makes them exceed limits in an otherwise a virtuous act. One example of such an excess can

be seen in the above quoted verse of Sūrah Tāhā. Here the Prophet (sws) has not been stopped on something which relates to base desires; he has been stopped from over trying and straining himself from reforming the rebellious who were not worthy of such pampering.

These glad tidings have been mentioned in Sūrah Fath in even more blatant words and we have already explained them from all aspects. For details, readers can consult the explanation of the following verses:

إِنَّا فَتَحْنَا لَكَ فَتْحًا مُبِينًا لِيَغْفِرَ لَكَ اللَّهُ مَا تَقَدَّمَ مِنْ ذَنْبِكَ وَمَا تَأَخَّرَ وَيُتِمَّ نِعْمَتَهُ
عَلَيْكَ وَيَهْدِيكَ صِرَاطًا مُسْتَقِيمًا (٤٨: ٢-١)

We have blessed you with an open victory so that God may forgive you your past and future blemishes and complete His favour upon and He may guide you to a straight path. (48:1-2)

The construction فَسَبِّحْ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّكَ has been explained in earlier *sūrahs*: when the words *tasbīh* and *ḥamd* occur together then the dominant meaning of the former word is to absolve the Almighty of all things which are against His majesty and by mention of the latter word the intention is to assert all attributes in Him which He in fact possesses. Monotheism is actually the result of the right combination of *tasbīh* and *ḥamd*.

With the blessing of the Almighty, we come to the end of this *sūrah*'s *tafsīr*. فالحمد لله حمدا كثيرا (So profound gratitude be to God)

Lahore,

4th July 1980

20th Sha'bān, 1400 AH

Sūrah Lahab

Central Theme and Relationship with Preceding and Succeeding *Sūrahs*

My mentor Imām Ḥamīd Uddin Farāhī has dealt so comprehensively and aptly with the central theme of this *sūrah* and its relationship with the preceding and succeeding *sūrahs* that instead of writing anything myself, I will just quote a few excerpts from his exegesis.

He writes:

It has been mentioned in the exegesis of Sūrah Naṣr that just as the Almighty completed the mission of the Prophet (sws) on the conquest of Makkah, similarly He ended the Book revealed to him on the mention of this great victory. This is an indication to the fact that the truth had reached its central place. It was the conquest of Makkah which was the final assignment of the Prophet (sws) because the House of God was the centre of monotheism and Islam and the fountainhead of the religion of Abraham (sws). After this, the only thing needed was perseverance and steadfastness for which the three succeeding *sūrahs* were appended to this *sūrah*: Sūrah Ikhḷāṣ which is a treasure trove of monotheism and the foundation of religion and then Sūrah Falaq and Sūrah Nās as supplications which provide perseverance and also protect this treasure of monotheism from the onslaughts of the devils among men and jinn.¹

After this, Imām Farāhī has mentioned the wisdom in the placement of Sūrah Lahab in between Sūrah Naṣr and the three *sūrahs* which come after Sūrah Lahab:

It is evident from these introductory remarks that all these *sūrahs*: Sūrah Naṣr, Sūrah Ikhḷāṣ, and the *mu‘awwadhatayn* are arranged together harmoniously. Hence the placement of Sūrah Lahab between them must necessarily be based on some wisdom otherwise this sequence of arrangement would become meaningless. Consequently, after deliberation on this issue, it becomes evident that the conquest and dominance mentioned in Sūrah Naṣr is actually predicted in and explained in Sūrah Lahab. Thus as per the overall

1. Farāhī, *Majmū‘ah Tafāsīr*, 2nd ed. (Lahore: Faran Foundation, 1998), 485.

sequence of arrangement of these *sūrahs*, it is implied that the Almighty made His Prophet victorious and destroyed his enemies. Accordingly, at another place, the Almighty has said:

جَاءَ الْحَقُّ وَزَهَقَ الْبَاطِلُ إِنَّ الْبَاطِلَ كَانَ زَهُوقًا (٨١:١٧)

The truth has become manifest and falsehood has been routed. Indeed, falsehood was bound to be routed. (17:81)

A very apt example of this sequence is the sermon delivered by the Prophet (sws) at the door of the Ka'bah on the day Makkah was conquered. He is reported to have said:

لا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وحده صدق وعده ونصر عبده وهزم الأحزاب وحده

There is no god except the one God. He fulfilled His promise and helped His servant and alone defeated all enemy groups.²

On the face of it, these are just three separate sentences. In reality, for a man of vision, they mention the subject matter of the three *sūrahs* in the same sequence as these *sūrahs* occur. The first sentence “there is no god except the one God” is the subject matter of Sūrah Kāfirūn; the second “He fulfilled His promise and helped His servant” that of Sūrah Naṣr and the third “and alone defeated all enemy groups” that of Sūrah Lahab. In other words, just as these three sentences are in sequence for a man of vision, similarly, those who reflect on the subject matter of these *sūrahs* would find them in a meaningful sequence.³

Sūrah's Place of Revelation and the Prediction it makes

One important question about this *sūrah* is whether it was revealed in Makkah or in Madīnah. Most exegetes regard it to be a Makkan *sūrah*. However, this opinion does not seem sound. The only argument they cite in support of their opinion is that this *sūrah* is the answer to the insolence and disrespect shown by Abū Lahab for the person of the Prophet (sws). Some narratives mention that when the Prophet (sws) was directed by the Almighty to warn his near ones from the wrath of God, he, one day, climbed the hillock of Ṣafā' and shouted the words: *wa ṣabāḥan*. In Arabia, these words were considered an alarm for some imminent danger. After hearing these words, all families of the Quraysh gathered around the Prophet (sws). He asked them that if he were to inform them that a great

2. Abū Dā'ūd, *Sunan*, vol. 4 (n.p.: Dār al-Fikr, n.d.), 185, (no. 4547).

3. Farāhī, *Majmū'ah Tafāsīr*, 2nd ed. (Lahore: Faran Foundation, 1998), 486.

army on the other side of the hillock was waiting in ambush to attack them, would they believe him? All of them replied in the affirmative because they had never heard him lie. At this, the Prophet (sws) said that if this was so, he would warn them of a great punishment that will come to them. Abū Lahab instantly responded with the words: تَبَّأُ لَكَ هَذَا دَعَوْتُنَا (May you be cursed! Did you call us for this reason).⁴

Exegetes say that it is this incident which occasioned the revelation of this *sūrah*. In other words, when Abū Lahab misbehaved with the Prophet (sws) by uttering these words, the Almighty in order to assure the Prophet (sws) revealed this *sūrah* in condemnation of Abū Lahab and his wife. Since this incident occurred early in the Makkan period, exegetes regard this *sūrah* to belong to that time. Now, as far as this incident is concerned, one cannot deny it; however, for various reasons it is improbable that this *sūrah* was revealed in response to Abū Lahab's misdeemeanour and to condemn him and his wife.

Firstly, it seems unlikely that the misbehaviour of an adversary of a Prophet (sws) would be responded to in such a tit-for-tat manner. Abū Lahab was not the only one who showed such enmity and disrespect to the Prophet (sws). Most leaders of Makkah and Tā'if were involved in this offence; however, in response to these excesses, the Prophet (sws) not only showed perseverance and ignored them, he urged his Companions (sws) also to adopt this attitude of forbearance and the Almighty too directed him repeatedly to adhere to it. Never did the Prophet (sws) utter even a word of condemnation in response to even the severest display of disrespect to him by any of them. He had been directed by the Almighty to call his people to the truth with wisdom and with kindly exhortation and he always adhered to this directive. He did not even label his people as *kuffār* until, as evident from my exegesis of Sūrah Kāfirūn, the truth had been communicated to them to such an extent that they were left with no excuse to deny it and until the time had arrived to migrate from them after announcing his acquittal what to speak of condemning and censuring them. The prophets before him adopted no different a methodology. How then is it possible that right at the beginning of his preaching mission, he became so offended by a remark of his uncle that for his assurance a whole *sūrah* be revealed as a result – a *sūrah* in which according to our exegetes not only is his uncle taken to task but also his aunt.

Secondly, there is a world of difference between the words of Abū Lahab تَبَّأُ لَكَ and the words تَبَّتْ يَدَا أَبِي لَهَبٍ of this *sūrah*. The former do imply condemnation and are used to demean and debase someone; however, this does not mean that other idioms which begin with the

4. Abū al-Qāsim 'Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Asākir, *Tārīkh Madīnah Dimashq*, vol. 67 (Beirut: Dār al-fikr, 1995) 165.

word **تَبَّ** also carry in them the meaning of humiliating and demeaning someone. Had the revealed words been **تَبَّ لِأَبِي لَهَبٍ** there could have been a possibility that Abū Lahab was being paid back in the same coins; however, the revealed words are **تَبَّتْ يَدَا أَبِي لَهَبٍ**. These words in no way have a ring of condemnation and reprimand, but as, will be explained later, they refer to the end of Abū Lahab's political dominance, a defeat of all his friends and allies and a devastation of his pomp and wealth. In other words, this sentence is not a statement of fact; it is a prediction of Abū Lahab's destruction given in the past tense. This prediction was made when the truth had been communicated to him in such an ultimate form that he was left with no excuse to deny it. It is thus incorrect to believe that this *sūrah* is an early Makkah one. It was revealed when the signs of Abū Lahab's destruction were becoming evident. He died a little after the battle of Badr; thus the revelation of this *sūrah* too should be around this period. It is also evident from the style of the *sūrah* that it was revealed before his death. Had it been revealed after his death the style of the *sūrah* would have been like **أَلَمْ تَرَ كَيْفَ** (Have you not seen?) or words similar to it. The past tense adopted in the opening verse of the *sūrah* is employed for expressing the certainty of a future event. Examples of this style abound in the Qur'ān and we have referred to them several times earlier.

Text and Translation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

تَبَّتْ يَدَا أَبِي لَهَبٍ وَتَبَّ (١) مَا أَغْنَىٰ عَنْهُ مَالُهُ وَمَا كَسَبَ (٢) سَيَصْلَىٰ نَارًا ذَاتَ لَهَبٍ (٣) وَأَمْرَأَتُهُ حَمَّالَةَ الْحَطَبِ (٤) فِي جِيدِهَا حَبْلٌ مِّن مَّسَدٍ (٥)

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Ever Merciful.

Both hands of Abū Lahab have been broken and he himself shall perish. Neither did his wealth benefit him nor what he had earned. He shall be cast into a blazing Fire; his wife too while carrying firewood. There will be a twisted rope round her neck. (111:1-5)

Explanation

تَبَّتْ يَدَا أَبِي لَهَبٍ وَتَبَّ (١)⁵

The Arabic word means **تَبَّ** “to perish and end up in loss”. From this, the idiom **تَبَّتْ يَدَا فُلَانٍ** has been formed, which can only mean that both hands of such and such a person have failed to achieve an objective. Failure of both hands is a complete picture of one's helplessness. If it is

5. Both hands of Abū Lahab have been broken and he himself shall perish.

said تَبَّتْ يَدَاهُ then this would mean “he was totally unable to compete”. Similarly, the words كَسَرَ يَدٌ (his hands broke) are a portrayal of crushing someone’s force.

A couplet of Fanad al-Zamānī reads:

وَتَرَكْنَا دِيَارَ تَغْلِبَ قَفْرًا
وَكَسَرْنَا مِنَ الْعَوَاةِ الْجَنَاحَا

(We flattened the area of Taghlib and broke the hands of its arrogant [people])

In Hebrew, a sister language of Arabic, this idiom is used also. In the Book of Ezekiel, it is written:

In the eleventh year, in the first month on the seventh day, the word of the Lord came to me. I have broken the arm of Pharaoh king of Egypt. It has not been bound up for healing or put in a splint so as to become strong enough to hold a sword. Therefore this is what the sovereign LORD says: I am against Pharaoh king of Egypt. I will break both his arms, the good arm as well as the broken one, and make the sword fall from his hand. (Ezekiel, 30: 20-22)

It is evident from this excerpt that there is no element of condemnation and censure present in this word. It is only a prediction that Abū Lahab’s political power will be crushed and he will also perish. It needs to be appreciated that he has been mentioned by his honorific title (*kuniyyah*) and when Arabs mention someone thus, it is generally out of respect for him.

Here a question arises that in the whole of the Qur’ān no enemy of the Prophet (sws) has been mentioned by name; so what was special about Abū Lahab that he was mentioned by his name?

The answer to this question is that there can be several reasons for mentioning him by name; however, two of them are very significant.

First, the nature of enmity between the Prophet (sws) and Abū Lahab was extremely different from the one between him and his other enemies. The main difference which other leaders of Quraysh had with the Prophet (sws) was that they considered the religion preached by him to be against their ancestral religion; the reason for this enmity was not that they thought that this religion was a danger to their own person interests. They had great respect for the lofty morals towards which he would call people. Many nobles among the Quraysh held him in high esteem for urging people to be kind to the orphans, the needy and the slaves. They wanted that all these admirable efforts be undertaken. In

this regard, they thought highly of the Prophet (sws) because they found him to be an embodiment of exalted traits. The anger they had for him was because in his preaching he would censure their idols. It has already been indicated in the exegesis of Sūrah Kāfirūn that they were ready to compromise with him if he adopted a soft tone for their idols.

On the other hand, the enmity of Abū Lahab was entirely for the protection of his personal interests. He was in charge of the treasury of the Baytullāh, which was called *rifādah*. He had taken such control of it that a greater part of the money received would go into his own pockets instead of being spent on orphans, the poor and the pilgrims. As a result, he had become the Shylock of his times. When he heard the calls of the Prophet (sws) towards lofty morals and the verses which depicted the objectives of building the Baytullāh,⁶ he felt that the time of his accountability was drawing near. If he did not make an immediate effort to curb the intensity of the Prophet's preaching, he would have to let go of all his vested interests from which he was being able to benefit at that time without any hindrance or impediment. He thus rose to make a concerted effort to oppose the Prophet (sws). Sūrah Humazah and some other *sūrahs* portray his character. People who agree or oppose a point of view whilst disregarding their personal interests have decency in them, even though their stance might not be correct; on the contrary, people who agree or oppose a point of view merely because of their personal interests are absolutely devoid of decency. It is because of this reason that there is a world of difference between the nature of enmity of Abū Jahal and Abū Sufyān and that of Abū Lahab. And it is because of this very reason that the name of Abū Lahab was specially mentioned so that people come to know of the character of people who are the real enemies of the truth and how the Almighty deals with them.

The second reason is that a trait of preaching of the prophets becomes evident from it: the real basis for association or disassociation with a prophet is the religion of God. It is people who become the companions and loved ones of a prophet who adopt the religion of God however much they be far from him and those who sever their relationship with him become adversaries of the religion of God, however much they may be near to him as regards being their kith and kin. In order to delineate this reality, the incidents of Noah's (sws) son, Abraham's (sws) father and Lot's (sws) wife are mentioned with great emphasis in the Qur'ān. For this very reason the name of Abū Lahab has been mentioned here: it should become evident from this mention that race and lineage have no status before God. A shepherd can become a loved one of a prophet if he accepts his message and if an uncle of his rejects his message, his

6. Many *sūrahs* of this group like Balad, Fīl and Quraysh discuss this topic.

relation with God and the prophet will stand severed. In other words, this is a practical testimony of the declaration of acquittal against the disbelievers mentioned in Sūrah Kāfirūn.

A question arises here: The words *تَبَّتْ يَدَا أَبِي لَهَبٍ* were seemingly enough to predict the downfall of Abū Lahab; what then is the use of the words *وَتَبَّتْ* after them? The answer to this question is that the first part is a prediction of his political downfall and the second part is a prediction of his own death. Consequently, these predictions materialized word for word. There were many of his special allies and cronies among the leaders of the Quraysh who were killed in the battle of Badr. This really damaged his political status. Then soon after this battle he was inflicted with small-pox. For fear that this disease might be contagious, neither his associates nor his sons and other relatives inquired after his health. It was in this state of helplessness that he died and for many days his dead body rotted in his house. At last, when his sons got tired of the taunts of people, they hired a few negroes and with their help threw his corpse in the upper region of Makkah and covered it with stones and pebbles which were flung from a distance. It should be kept in consideration that flinging stones at someone in those times was tantamount to cursing him.

This fact also needs to remain in mind that all leaders of the Quraysh participated in the battle of Badr with great fervour and enthusiasm; however, Abū Lahab stayed back because of cowardice. In fact, he forced a person from whom he had no hope of recovering a loan to take part in the battle in lieu of the loan. This person did take part and was most probably killed whilst the spineless Abū Lahab remained in his house; however, even this scheme could not save him from death. Very soon, as I have indicated earlier, he was inflicted with small-pox and died a humiliating death. In my opinion, the words *وَتَبَّتْ* refer to this dreadful fate of his.

مَا أَغْنَىٰ عَنْهُ مَالُهُ وَمَا كَسَبَ ۖ (٢)

For those who have greed for money, money is everything. So much so, they are overcome with the evil notion that money will even save them from the grasp of God. In Sūrah Humazah, this mentality of such money-worshipping miserly people is revealed in the following words:

الَّذِي جَمَعَ مَالًا وَعَدَّدَهُ يَحْسَبُ أَنَّ مَالَهُ أَخْلَدَهُ (١٠٤: ٢-٣)

He who amassed wealth and counted it over thinking that his wealth has rendered him immortal. (104:2-3)

7. Neither did his wealth benefit him nor what he had earned

Whilst explaining these verses, I have written that the words actually portray Abū Lahab and his companions. Such people never think that one day they will have to face God and that He can put them through such a trial which will make them realize the shallowness of wealth. All his life, Abū Lahab remained under this false notion and at last the time did come when he saw from his very eyes that even the greatest sum of money cannot save man from God's grasp.

Exegetes have recorded many opinions while interpreting the words وَمَا كَسَبَ. Some think that they refer to his sons. Although it is true, as pointed out earlier, that in the end even the sons of Abū Lahab could not be of any use to him, however this interpretation seems far-fetched. Some others regard them to refer to his illegal earnings; notwithstanding the fact that these words are inappropriate for such an interpretation, the words مَا أَغْنَى عَنْهُ مَالُهُ leave no need for this interpretation because it would amount to mere repetition. In my opinion, these words refer to deeds which he did whilst thinking them to be virtuous; however, because of his evil disposition and his subscription to polytheism they have no value. It should remain in consideration that he was in charge of the treasury of the Baytullāh. Therefore, he had to see to some welfare works for the poor, the indigent and the pilgrims. However, he was forced to carry out these as mere pretence so that they could cover up his misdeeds. Such works have no value before the Almighty.

سَيَصْلَىٰ نَارًا ذَاتَ لَهَبٍ (٣)⁸

The two preceding verses depict Abū Lahab's fate in this world. In this verse, is depicted the fate he will encounter in the Hereafter: He shall be cast into a blazing Fire. The fire has been described by the words ذَاتَ لَهَبٍ. The person who will be cast into it is called by the honorific title أَبُو لَهَبٍ (Abū Lahab). In accordance with this name, he will enter a fire which has a similar name. لَهَبٌ means "flame". It seems that Abū Lahab had a reddish-white complexion like that of a flame. For this reason, he either himself adopted this honorific title or his flatterers called him by this name and this honorific title became so famous that his real name: 'Abd al-'Uzzā was forgotten. By this description, the Qur'ān has pointed to the reality that the very redish white complexion which was a source of pride for him in this world will lead him to doom. He will be cast into a fire whose flames would be blazing. The message which is meant to be put across is that pride on outer beauty has no value; it can lead a person to ruin if there is no inner beauty to go along with it.

8. He shall be cast into a blazing Fire

وَأَمْرَأَتُهُ حَمَّالَةَ الْحَطَبِ (٤)⁹

The verses say that his wife will also be cast into the blazing fire with him and she will be carrying firewood. The reason that his wife too will meet this fate is right in accordance with justice: she herself was his associate in his crimes which led him to Hell. At times, wife and children become a source for a person committing certain crimes which not only ruin him but also his wife and children. For this very reason the Qur'ān has said:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِنَّ مِنْ أَزْوَاجِكُمْ وَأَوْلَادِكُمْ عَدُوًّا لَكُمْ فَاحْذَرُوهُمْ (١٤:٦٤)

Believers! Some among your spouses and your children are also your enemies: beware of them. (64:14)

The manner in which a person's wife and children are regarded as his enemies is that a person while trying to comply with their unwarranted and needless desires and while wrongly pampering them becomes indifferent to the directives of God and becomes guilty of breeching these directives. In this respect, the wife and the children are called a trial and the Prophet (sws) has warned that a person's children can make him stingy and fearful. It seems that like unseemly women, the wife of Abū Lahab also was fond of fashion and jewelry, had a great greed for wealth and also possessed a proclivity for showing off. She ruined the already ruined temperament of Abū Lahab. So much so, she also became worthy of the same punishment as that of her husband.

There exists a lot difference of opinion in the interpretation of the expression حَمَّالَةَ الْحَطَبِ. Most exegetes think that this expression humiliatingly depicts what her state was in this world. Like a slave-lady, she would go to the forest with a rope dangling in her neck in order to gather a pieces of wood. This is the most famous of all interpretations. However, the more famous it is, the farther away it is from the truth.

It should be kept in consideration that it was the Quraysh who ruled Arabia. Among the Quraysh, the tribe of Banū Hāshim in particular was the real masters of Arabia. Abū Lahab being a member of a very rich clan was very rich himself. In the times of the Prophet (sws), he held such an esteemed position in the religious polity of the Quraysh that he virtually had the reigns of power in his own hands. Can it be imagined that the wife of such an affluent leader needed to go to the forest to gather wood? Such was the state of affairs of these wealthy people that each possessed several slave men and women and such was the delicate

9. His wife too while carrying firewood

temperament of their wives that they would regard suckling their own children as something below their dignity. Even the commoners among them would hire women of other tribes to suckle their children.

Abū Lahab's wife was no ordinary lady. She was Umm Jamīl bint Ḥarb, a lady of very high status from among the tribe of Banū 'Abd al-Shams who was wedded into the Banū Hāshim tribe. If due consideration is given to the position her husband held in the Arab nobility, it would not be an exaggeration to say that she had the same status as is held these days by the first lady of a country.

Probably because of this very reason some people have said that she would bring thorny bushes and throw them at the door of the Prophet's house and some others say that she had a habit of back-biting and twisting matters and then wrongly conveying them to others to create discord between people. They opine that the words *حَمَّالَةَ الْحُطْبِ* portray this bad habit of hers. These interpretations are so baseless and so far off from the linguistic principles of Arabic that to criticize them would be wasting the time of the readers; hence, I will ignore them. For details, people can consult the exegesis of Imām Farāhī.

In my opinion, the word *حَمَّالَةَ الْحُطْبِ* is in an accusative of state (*حَال*) and it depicts her state when she will be cast into Hell together with her husband. At that time, her situation will be akin to the criminal who carries the very instruments which are responsible for his or her execution.

Except for regarding *حَمَّالَةَ* as an accusative of state (*حَال*), there can be no other possibility to explain its syntactical construction, in which case all the above mentioned interpretations become baseless. This is because if *حَمَّالَةَ* is regarded as an accusative of state, these interpretations become grammatically impossible.

The state of affairs of a criminal on the Day of Judgement is described at various places in the Qur'ān. If this is deliberated upon, the portrayal of Abū Lahab's wife by the words *حَمَّالَةَ الْحُطْبِ* is in accordance with this description:

وَهُمْ يَحْمِلُونَ أَوْزَارَهُمْ عَلَى ظُهُورِهِمْ أَلَا سَاءَ مَا يَزِرُونَ (٣١:٦)

And they shall bear their burdens on their backs and listen! evil shall be what they will be carrying. (6:31)

In Sūrah Naml, this description is even more elaborate:

لِيَحْمِلُوا أَوْزَارَهُمْ كَامِلَةً يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ وَمِنْ أَوْزَارِ الَّذِينَ يُضِلُّونَهُمْ بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ (٢٥:١٦)

So that they carry all their burdens on the Day of Judgement together

with the burdens of those who in their ignorance were misled by them. (16:25)

It is evident from these details that she would not only be carrying the burden of her own sins on her back, but also the ones of her husband's for which she herself was a motive and that this burden would be in the form of firewood.

It can thus be surmised from this discussion that Abū Lahab's wife is not mentioned in this verse to appease emotions by condemning and censuring her, as has been generally understood. On the contrary, her mention is to effectively drive home the message specifically to the female community that how an impious lady can lead not only herself to doom but also her husband and children. The Qur'ān has mentioned the female community right beside the male one so that each can learn a lesson more effectively from the fate of their own community. Since Abū Lahab's wife belonged to the upper strata of the society, hence both affluent ladies as well as slave ladies could learn a lesson from her fate.

فِي جِيدِهَا حَبْلٌ مِّن مَّسَدٍ¹⁰ (٥)

These words complete the portrayal of Abū Lahab's wife drawn in the previous verse. She will wear a thick rope round her neck – the one which is carried by slave-women who gather firewood. It is strange that our exegetes are of the opinion that this will be her state in the Hereafter; so it is odd that they have not regarded the previous verse to relate to the Hereafter because according to the linguistic principles of Arabic the two verses are so deeply connected that one cannot sever them in any way.

The word مَسَدٍ is used for the fiber, leaves or crust of dates. Strong ropes are made out of it. Hence the word is also used for a resilient rope whether it is made of the fiber of dates or of leather or of something similar. Its use for the rope of a spinning wheel is very common which is a testimony to the fact it is commonly used for a strong and thick rope.

The apparent interpretation of the verse is that when Abū Lahab's wife will rise on the Day of Judgement, a sturdy rope will be dangling from her neck which will be as thick as the rope found in the necks of slave-women who carry firewood. A little deliberation shows that the addition of this feature to her brings out the following facts:

1. It explains the state of Abū Lahab's wife mentioned in the expression حَمَّالَةَ الْخَطَبِ.
2. It depicts her state of humiliation which she will encounter in the Hereafter.

10. There will be a twisted rope round her neck

3. It illustrates the harmony between the deeds and the consequences of these deeds: the very necklace she used to arrogantly wear in this world will be transformed into a thick rope in the next world. As a result, she will resemble a slave-woman who goes out to fetch firewood whilst a rope is suspended from her neck.

4. Conceited women besides being fond of embellishing themselves are equally fond of showing off. For this reason, they pay special attention to the weight and size of their ornaments; for this reason the rope round the neck of Abū Lahab's wife is depicted to be a thick one.

By the grace of God, with these lines, the *tafsīr* of this *sūrah* reaches its end. فالحمد لله حمدا كثيرا (so abundant gratitude be to God)

Lahore,

17th July 1980

3rd Ramaḍān, 1400 AH

Sūrah Ikḥlās

Central Theme

This *sūrah* is among those *sūrahs* of the Qur'ān the very name of which reveals its central theme. It is called *ikḥlās* which is precisely what the *sūrah* is all about. *Ikḥlās* means to have faith in God's being and His attributes or in the essential requisites of His attributes in a way that eliminates any trace of associating others with Him. As far as accepting God is concerned, the world has always acknowledged the existence of a superior being. In fact, this acceptance must be regarded as a self-evident requirement of human nature. An equally stark reality is that Satan has always remained an eternal enemy of *tawhīd* (oneness of God). He has persisted in trying to deceive man in this matter by contaminating this concept such that believing Allah at times became tantamount to not believing Him. To illuminate the essentials of *tawhīd*, God sent forth a long series of Prophets. Unfortunately, time and again, man continued to squander this reality every time he acquired it. It was for the sake of *tawhīd* that the Prophet Abraham (sws) migrated from his people and established the abode of his children in a barren stretch of land -- where they could truly worship God and also remain shielded from the onslaughts of an idolatrous environment. Quite ironically, his own progeny gradually converted the centre of *tawhīd* (The Ka'bah) built by himself into a temple of idols, as is mentioned in the Qur'ān. The prejudice of their self-carved idols became so intense that they vehemently argued with God and His last Prophet (sws) that until and unless the status of their idols is accepted, they would not acknowledge the rights of God. It was as a result of this outrageous attitude that the Prophet (sws) proclaimed his acquittal from them as is mentioned in Sūrah Kāfirūn.

Period of Revelation

The proclamation of acquittal was solely meant for the Quraysh and the Idolaters of Makkah. Various tribes of the People of the Book also existed in Arab. Although they were the recipients of holy books, Satan had inveigled them too into horrible forms of polytheism. They had considerable influence in Madīnah and its whereabouts, and the Arabs had always openly acclaimed their superiority in religious affairs.

As long as the Prophet (sws) was in Makkah, their opposition remained

clandestine, but it turned into open hostility after he migrated to Madīnah. The People of the Book arrogantly reckoned that since they were the recipients of Holy Books, the Qur'ān would definitely regard their beliefs and deeds as superior to those of the Idolaters. But the Qur'ān made it very clear to them that as far as their beliefs and deeds were concerned, they were a disgrace to mankind. The Christians, particularly, were impelled into open antagonism like the Jews by the criticism of the Qur'ān on their forms of polytheism. A united opposition front was thereby created as the Jews, the Christians and the Idolaters became allies against the Islamic forces. The situation called for a comprehensive explication of the meaning of *ikhhlās* that should completely eliminate any shred of polytheism, and as a result of which the People of the Book and the Idolaters should have no doubt about the actual truth. It was in these circumstances that this *sūrah* was revealed in Madīnah. Although a group of scholars believes that its revelation took place in Makkah, the comprehensive nature of the *sūrah*, as will be explained later, testifies that it was revealed in Madīnah when the enmity of the people of the Book, especially, the Christians had become evident.

Placement in the Qur'ān

This *sūrah* is placed after Sūrah Lahab. This is an indication of the fact that after the destruction of the biggest foe of Islam (as depicted in Sūrah Lahab), time is ripe for the proclamation of the essence of *tawhīd* once again in this land, for which Abraham (sws) had built the House of God. Hence, in this *sūrah*, the basic Islamic teaching of *tawhīd* is forcefully asserted. Prior to Sūrah Lahab, the glad tidings of the victory of the Islamic forces are already given in Sūrah Naṣr.

The Prophet's struggle against his enemies, as we all very well know, had nothing to do with worldly gains; rather it had the purpose before it of establishing the Kingdom of God in the pagan Arabian society, and in banishing all forms of polytheism from there. Consequently, every aspect of *tawhīd* is highlighted in this *sūrah*. The Qur'ān actually ends with it because the last pair of *sūrahs* which succeed it are in fact more like two sentinels guarding this treasure of *tawhīd* from Satan's tampering.

Relation to the Overall Arrangement

The overall arrangement of the Qur'ān is such that the beginning and the end are very similar. The end of the Qur'ān converges to the topic with which it commences – *tawhīd* and *ikhhlās*. Sūrah Fātiḥah and Sūrah Ikhhlās, the beginning and the end of the Qur'ān distinctly bring out the reality that the concept of *tawhīd* encompasses all our beliefs. It is mentioned in Sūrah Fātiḥah that God is the sole Cherisher and Sustainer

of the worlds and Master of the Day of Judgement, and as such we all must always express our gratitude to Him. Here, in this *sūrah*, the attributes that wipe out any trace of polytheism are explained positively as well as negatively, which actually forms the basis of the study of *Tawhīd*. Moreover, it should also be kept in mind that the *sūrahs* which constitute this last group are fundamental to the study of Islam.

Text and Translation

قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ (١) اللَّهُ الصَّمَدُ (٢) لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ (٣) وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ (٤)

Say: “That God, is alone. He is with every one. He is neither anyone’s father nor anyone’s son; and there is none like Him.”

Explanation

قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ (١)¹

The word قُلْ is a command that means “to proclaim”, “to declare”, “to openly announce something” so that every person becomes fully aware of it and there remains no ambiguity about it, leaving no room for further arguments. The word is used in this very sense in the opening verse of Sūrah Kāfirūn as well.

The need for such a declaration only arises when after a long period of dialogue and debate, it becomes clear that the truth has been fully disclosed, and people are now indulging in debate only to prolong and complicate matters. In such cases, it is better to say whatever one has to in a stern and decisive manner so that the addressees become aware that everything about the subject has been said; no more time will now be wasted upon the issue and it is equally unlikely that any change in stance shall occur.

The word هُوَ in the opinion of this writer is the pronoun of the fact (*ḍamīr al-sha’n*), which is used when the implied meaning or situation is so clearly understood between the speaker and to whom it is addressed that the mind instinctively jumps to it. (JS is this the correct definition)

After the advent of Islam, the concepts of God’s being and His attributes were hot subjects of debate. Such was the dominance of these issues that the other Islamic beliefs of Prophethood and Life in the Hereafter were only partially discussed. The question of *tawhīd* was the most important. The Quraysh had made it their own as well as their forefathers’ point of prestige and were in no way willing to bear the defamation of their deities or of their forefathers’ who had worshiped them. The Qur’ān in many places has cited instances when they would fume with rage and would get

1. Say: That God is alone.

ready to pounce upon the preachers of this concept whenever the concept of *tawhīd* was brought up in front of them. On the one hand, was this vanity and ego of the Quraysh and on the other was the resoluteness of the Qur'ān and the Prophet (sws) that there shall be no compromise whatsoever between monotheism and polytheism.

As long as this debate continued with the Quraysh, no confusion arose about God's being or His attributes. They had adopted idolatry because it was their ancestral religion. They did not indulge in fabricating excessively needless distinctions in reasoning to support their beliefs simply because they were illiterate. In Madīnah, however, as soon as the people of the Book became involved in this debate, a new dimension was added to the affair. In spite of being the recipients of Holy Books, they had become incriminated with outrageous forms of polytheism. The only difference was that they had invented a set system to support their beliefs. In this regard, the weird Christian mythology, in particular, was a fantastic production, unrivalled as far as the complications and confusions it had created. The Qur'ān challenged all of them and exposed their heresies upon them. Some among them accepted faith while others who did not were intellectually defeated by the Qur'ān to the extent that the Arabs were no longer overawed by their religious superiority.

The new situation called for the revelation of a *sūrah* that would root out all traces of polytheism of both the Idolaters and the People of the Book, and would also put a complete halt to Satan's incursions in the concept of *tawhīd*. Needless to say that it had to be both concise and comprehensive to enable everyone to learn and memorize its contents. As a result, this *sūrah* comprising four very short verses was revealed. The profound meanings it encompasses prompted many scholars to regard it as being a third of the Qur'ān. A little contemplation shows that there is no exaggeration in this fact. The message of the Qur'ān can be divided into three distinct topics: *tawhīd* (monotheism), *risālah* (prophethood) and *ma'ād* (hereafter) – which means that *tawhīd* occupies one third of the Qur'ānic content that is scattered in various *sūrahs*. Its core is epitomized in this comprehensive *sūrah*. In other words, the gist of the Qur'ānic arguments by which it refutes polytheism is concisely stated here.

One thing that should be kept in mind is that the words **قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ** do not necessitate that this *sūrah* was revealed because someone had inquired from the Prophet (sws) about the attributes of God; but as is indicated earlier, the very circumstances in which the question of *tawhīd* had become a burning topic were enough to cause its revelation. **قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ** means “the God about whom you are debating and arguing has these attributes;

hear them from me ...,” after which these attributes are stated. Suffice it to say that to reform heretical beliefs, only a correct knowledge of these attributes is all that is required after which the path to the appreciation of other attributes of God is opened.

The word **الله** is a noun used for the personal name of God, and the Idolaters of Arabia always regarded it so. The Qur’ān ascribes all virtuous and gracious attributes of God to this noun. The verse says that God is **أَحَدٌ** (Aḥad). Linguists clearly differentiate between **أَحَدٌ** (Aḥad) and **وَاحِدٌ** (Wāḥid). **أَحَدٌ** (Aḥad) means someone in whose being none can be associated, and **وَاحِدٌ** (Wāḥid) means someone in whose attributes none can be associated. Probably this is the reason why the word **أَحَدٌ** (Aḥad) has never been used as an attribute other than that of God. This attribute also necessitates that He have no kin or relations, and at the same time it warrants that He be unique and peerless in every sense. It also follows from this that God is uncreated and has always existed, and that everything else has been created and brought into existence. Naturally, someone who is foremost out of His own accord should always exist because if at one time He never was, then it cannot be said of Him that He always existed. Summing up the discussion, two things must necessarily be accepted: Firstly, God has always existed, and secondly, everything except Him is His creation. These are the two necessary outcomes of His uniqueness and to deny both of these would be against sense and reason.

اللهُ الصَّمَدُ (٢)

By the word **صَمَدٌ** (Ṣamad) is actually meant a large rock behind which refuge is sought from an enemy attack. It is because of this root meaning that it is also used for the leader of a nation, who is a resort and a refuge for his people. In many Holy scriptures, particularly in the Psalms of David, God has been called a rock, and has also been addressed as the rock of help³.

The attribute **صَمَدٌ** (Ṣamad) is mentioned after **أَحَدٌ** (Aḥad) to explain and qualify the meanings of **أَحَدٌ** (Aḥad), just as the attribute **حَمِيدٌ** (Ḥamīd) (worthy of all praise) is always mentioned immediately after the attribute, **غَنِيٌّ** (Ghanī) (free of all needs) in the Qur’ān. The attribute, **غَنِيٌّ** (Ghanī) might create a misconception that since God is free of all needs and is above His creation, no relationship can be established with Him. This may cause people to worship other deities as a means to obtain His

2. He is with everyone.

3 . The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer. (Psalms:18)

nearness. The attribute **حَمِيدٌ** (Ḥamīd) is stated immediately afterwards for the reason that this misconception should not even originate. It clarifies that though He does not need any one and is above and beyond His creation, yet He is the fountainhead of all praises and thanksgivings. As such everyone should turn to Him and directly seek Him, and never turn to others in despair.

Owing to exactly the same reasons, the attribute **صَمَدٌ** (Ṣamad) here is mentioned immediately after the attribute **أَحَدٌ** (Aḥad). It serves to caution and prod someone who might become overwhelmed with the concept of God's uniqueness and aloofness from all, and regard Him as a detached and an unconcerned Creator. This might subsequently lead him to worship other beings as a means to procure His nearness. This can never happen if the implications of **صَمَدٌ** (Ṣamad) are properly understood. There is no doubt that God is free of all needs and above and beyond His creation, yet at the same time He provides and sustains them, hears and answers their calls of distress and fulfils their physical and spiritual needs. He is a rock behind which refuge can be sought – a haven and sanctuary for all.

It would be appropriate to mention here the cause which has so often led a people astray as regards its religious beliefs and opened for them the way to polytheism. This has been invariably due to the fact that they did not maintain a balance between certain complementary pairs of attributes of God. An acute bias towards one of them often made them completely overlook the qualifications and stipulations warranted by its counterpart. The Jews and the Christians, in particular, can be cited as examples in this regard.

لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ (٣)⁴

The word **أَحَدٌ** (Aḥad) also implies this meaning as pointed out before. Matters which may cause gross misconceptions are stressed more than once in the Qur'ān in various styles so that the true concept becomes so evident that no one may have an excuse to deny it. So, the whole issue is restated here in this verse in another way. We must bear in mind that the Arabs also had a mythology of their own which was very similar in detail to the Greek and Hindu mythologies. The Idolaters regarded the angels to be the daughters of God. Although the Jews were the recipients of the Torah, yet they regarded 'Uzayr as the son of God. The Christians had established the Trinity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Their prejudice for Trinity took them so far that at one time their priests,

4. He is neither anyone's father nor anyone's son.

at whose hands people accepted Christianity, made their converts curse the God whose attributes are spelled out in this *sūrah*. Indeed, the anger and the venom they had for this *sūrah* was because the concept of *tawhīd* expressed in it had made a direct hit upon their beliefs. Considering it, God could be regarded neither as a father nor a son, nor could anyone be regarded as His mother.

Historically, the Qur'ān was the first to kindle the light of *tawhīd* in this world in such a profound manner. This fact is now being acknowledged even by people who at one time were confined in the shackles of national and religious prejudices, and were in no way willing to come out and face the reality. The Christians, who once cursed the God whose attributes are mentioned in this *sūrah*, have now people among them who openly acclaim that the Qur'ān was the foremost in enlightening the world with the true concept of *tawhīd* in such a profound manner.

وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ⁵ (٤)

كُفُوًا means “equal, like, peer, match, similar”. This verse means that Allah has no parallel or equal. He is the Creator and all other things are His creation. Everyone has needs while He has none. All need Him while He needs none. Everyone is mortal while He is the only immortal.

Summing up, the message of the *sūrah* lies in the concept of *tawhīd* it brings out by mention of certain complementary pairs of attributes of God. The essence of which is that God has always existed and shall always exist; He was when there was nothing and shall remain when everything ceases to be; He is complete and entire in His being and is above all needs; everyone needs Him while He needs none; He is a refuge for all and on Him everyone depends; He brings everything into existence, and by His orders everything is destroyed; He is father to none nor has He a father; He is the Creator and the Cherisher of all and fashions and sustains everything; nothing is from His substance and being; He has no peer or equal and indeed all are His servants and slaves.

With the grace of God, the explanation of this *sūrah* ends here. فَالْحَمْدُ
أَوَّلًا وَآخِرًا (so gratitude be to Him at all times)

Lahore,
25th July, 1980 AD
11 Ramadān, 1400 AH

5. And there is none like Him.

Sūrah Falaq

Subject Matter and Relationship with the Previous Sūrah

In the introduction to Sūrah Ikhlās, the previous *sūrah*, we had explained that the belief of monotheism is the foundation of Islam. For this reason, the Almighty began His Book with a mention of this belief and ended it on it too. It is as if Sūrah Ikhlās is the last *sūrah* of the Qur’ān. The last two *sūrahs* which come after it – the *mu’awwadhatayn* – are like two sentinels guarding this treasure of monotheism. In these two *sūrahs*, people have been asked to seek refuge with God from all evils which in any way can distract and divert them from monotheism.

This elaborate arrangement for monotheism is because, as referred to before, it is the foundation of religion. If a person is fully grounded in the belief of monotheism, it is as if he is fully grounded in religion. If temporarily he does get distracted from any directive of religion, it is hoped that because he is fully attached to its foundation he will be guided by God’s grace to the right path. On the contrary, if he is led astray in any way regarding the belief of monotheism, there is a strong chance that he will keep getting further away from religion and a time may come that he may reach a point of no return.

The second reason for this elaborate arrangement is that in order to achieve success in the test in which a person is put through in this world, it is essential that he fight Satan till his death and defeat him. It is on this victory over Satan that his success in the Hereafter hinges. The special area in which Satan has sworn to defeat mankind is monotheism. He has challenged the Almighty that He will lie in ambush for man on the path of monotheism and will try to divert him from this path and put him on the path of polytheism. The Qur’ān mentions his challenge in the following words:

قَالَ فِيمَا أَغْوَيْتَنِي لَأَقْعُدَنَّ لَهُمْ صِرَاطَكَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ ثُمَّ لَآتِيَنَّهُمْ مِّنْ بَيْنِ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِمْ وَعَنْ أَيْمَانِهِمْ وَعَنْ شَمَائِلِهِمْ وَلَا تَجِدُ أَكْثَرَهُمْ شَاكِرِينَ (٧: ١٦-١٧)

Satan said: “Because You have led me astray I shall sit in ambush for these [children of Adam] on Your straight path [of monotheism]. Then I shall launch an onslaught on them from their front and from their rear and from their right and from their left. Then You will find a greater part of them ungrateful [deviants from monotheism].” (7:16-17)

The details of the evil scheme devised by Satan to lure man to polytheism are mentioned in his own words in Sūrah Nisā' thus:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَغْفِرُ أَنْ يُشْرَكَ بِهِ وَيَغْفِرُ مَا دُونَ ذَلِكَ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَمَنْ يُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ ضَلَالًا بَعِيدًا إِنَّ يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِهِ إِلَّا إِنَاثًا وَإِنْ يَدْعُونَ إِلَّا شَيْطَانًا مَرِيدًا لَعَنَهُ اللَّهُ وَقَالَ لَا تُخَدِّنْ مِنْ عِبَادِكَ نَصِيبًا مَفْرُوضًا وَلَا ضَلَّلْتَهُمْ وَلَا مَنِّتَهُمْ وَلَا مَرَّتَهُمْ فَلَيُبْتَلَنَّ أَذَانَ الْأَنْعَامِ وَلَا مَرَّتَهُمْ فَلَيُعَذِّبَنَّهُ خَلْقَ اللَّهِ وَمَنْ يَتَّخِذِ الشَّيْطَانَ وَلِيًّا مِّنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَقَدْ خَسِرَ خُسْرَانًا مُّبِينًا (٤: ١١٦-١١٩)

God will never forgive that partners be associated with Him and may forgive sins other than this for whomsoever He wishes. And He who associates partners with God has indeed strayed far. Whenever they call upon someone other than God, they call upon [female deities] and call upon Satan, the rebellious. Rather than to Him, they pray but to females: they pray but to a rebellious Satan. May God's curse be on him for he has said: "I shall lure a specific number of Your servants and lead them astray. I shall entice them into vain desires and lead them to slit the ears of cattle and I shall show them the way to tamper with God's creation." And he who chooses Satan rather than God for his protector will end up in open misfortune. (4:116-119)

This subject is discussed even more comprehensively in Sūrah Banī Isrā'īl (17:61-65). It might be of benefit to the reader to take a look at the explanation of these verses in this exegesis¹ so that all its implications become clear and it becomes evident that the greatest of Satan's effort is to entangle man in the noose of polytheism. The reason is that if man adopts this evil, he will strip himself of God's mercy and will never be forgiven. It is through this revenge that the jealousy and hatred Satan has for mankind is appeased.

In order to combat this evil scheme, arose the need to inform man here at the end of the Qur'ān of not only a comprehensive teaching of monotheism², but also of the best way to protect himself of the lures and machinations of Satan. It is by adopting this way that every servant of God can protect his treasure of monotheism from the onslaughts of Satan.

In order to explain this methodology, man is informed of two things:

1. See: Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāhī, *Tadabbur-i Qur'ān*, vol. 3, 765-773.

2. Reference is to the preceding sūrah: Ikhlās which is a comprehensive statement of monotheism. (Translator)

one in this *sūrah* and one in the next *sūrah*.

In this *sūrah*, man is told that in order to shield himself from the onslaughts of Satan the only way is to seek refuge with God. There is no one except God who can protect him from the fraudulent and deceptive measures of Satan. If man is not vigilant enough all the time, there is a strong chance that he will be misled by him and then it would become difficult for him to come out of this situation.

In the next *sūrah*, man is informed of the attributes of God by means of which he can attain refuge with God by which he can shield himself from the lures and baits of Satan. It was only God Himself who could have informed man of these attributes and it is His great favour on man that He has done so. It is through His noble attributes that a correct relationship can be established between God and man and only God knows which of His attributes can act as a shield for man against the blitz launched by Satan. Man cannot know them of himself and a small error in this can spoil his efforts.

Another thing which is mentioned in the next *sūrah* is the extent to which Satan can lead man astray and the most effective of his methods in this regard. The purpose is to make man aware of the might of his enemy so that neither is he over-awed by his strength nor does he become indifferent to him. Moreover, he is fully informed of the paths from which Satan can attack and is also aware of the weapons God has given him to combat this enemy of his.

Text and Translation

قُلْ أَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ الْفَلَقِ (١) مِنْ شَرِّ مَا خَلَقَ (٢) وَمِنْ شَرِّ غَاسِقٍ إِذَا وَقَبَ (٣) وَمِنْ شَرِّ
التَّفَّاتَاتِ فِي الْعُقَدِ (٤) وَمِنْ شَرِّ حَاسِدٍ إِذَا حَسَدَ (٥)

Say: "With the Lord who brings forth I seek refuge from the evil of all that He has created and from the evil of the night as it spreads and from the evil of those who blow on knots and from the evil of the envious person when he envies." (112:1-5)

Explanation

قُلْ أَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ الْفَلَقِ^(١)^٣

The word *الْفَلَقِ* (*al-falaq*) has been generally translated as “morning”; however, its real meaning is “to tear apart something”. Since morning appears after tearing apart the shroud of the night, the word *al-falaq* is also used for it. However, morning is not the only thing which appears after a process of tearing apart: everything emerges from something after splitting it apart. A plant appears from a seed after breaking it apart; vegetation germinates from the earth after ripping it apart; fountains and rivers sprout after the mountains are cleft apart. Similarly, off-springs come out from eggs after slitting them and all living beings emerge from wombs after emerging through their openings. In the light of this, what is the basis on which one can restrict the meaning of *al-falaq*. In this writer’s opinion, keeping in view its placement and context, it should be interpreted in its wider meaning. In the Arabic language it is also used thus. Just as the expression *قَالَ فِي الْإِصْبَاحِ* (٩٦:٦) is used in the Qur’ān; similarly the expression *قَالِقُ الْحَبِّ وَالْتَوَى* (٩٥:٦) is also used in it. Similarly, about the heavens and earth, the Qur’ān states: *كَانَتَا رَتْقًا فَفَتَقْنَاهُمَا* (٣: ٢١). This means that both the heavens and the earth are closed and then are torn apart. The implication is that God showers down the rain after opening the heavens and grows plants from the earth after tearing it apart.

I have translated the expression *رَبِّ الْفَلَقِ* as “He who brings forth.” In my opinion, this translation is more comprehensive and meaningful. It is also in harmony with the subject which follows, as shall be presently explained.

مِنْ شَرِّ مَا خَلَقَ^(٢)^٤

This is a mention of the objective for which refuge is sought with the Creator who brings forth. Man is urged to seek from the evil of the things created with the very Being who has created them and no one other than Him should be called upon for this purpose. Some other being can only give man refuge when that being is more powerful than the one who has created these things and it is absolutely illogical that any being be more powerful and prevailing than the creator of this universe. Hence seeking refuge with someone other than God from the evil of things created by God is absolute foolishness. Here it should be kept in consideration that all things have been created by God. No one is the

3. Say: I seek refuge with the Lord who brings forth

4. He who brings forth the dawn.

5. He who brings forth grain and the fruit-stone.

6. from the evil of all that He has created

Creator except Him.

Whatever God has created has been created for a positive purpose. However, whenever He wants, He can change them into evil. Rain is an absolute blessing for this world; however, if the Almighty wants, He can turn it into a punishment. Similarly, man himself because of his lack of awareness or ill-use turns something which is originally beneficial to him as something harmful. The correct way to protect oneself from the ill-effects of things is that a person should seek refuge with God alone. He should not start beseeching an object or a person thinking that that object or person per se has the power to effect a change, as has been the custom of polytheistic nations. Nor should a person start calling any one other than God as *ghawth* (the helper) or *qutub* (the pivot)⁷ thinking that they would save him from God's grasp. Only God can help a person from God's grasp. The various permissible measures a person adopts to save himself from calamities eg consulting a doctor in case of sickness are not against this principle on the condition that he thinks that the real doctor is only God Himself. Only He can cure a sickness. If He does not intend to cure a sickness, there is no one who in any way can cure the slightest of maladies.

It becomes evident from these details that only one utterance is enough to close many doors which lead to polytheism. It also roots out duality and the concept that good and evil have separate Gods and kingdoms. Polytheistic nations while thinking that each calamity per se can cause benefit or harm start beseeching it. The truth of the matter is that a calamity has no independent existence; it is actually a manifestation of the various creations of God which comes into being by God's leave and casts its effects by His directive and it is only His help which can be instrumental in shielding a person from it. Hence the real haven and sanctuary is God Almighty.

وَمِنْ شَرِّ غَاسِقٍ إِذَا وَقَبَ⁸

ghāsiq (ghāsiq) refers to night when it becomes dark once the glow of dusk disappears. وَقَبَ (*waqaba*) means the spreading of darkness. Lexicographers have written that *ghāsiq* also means "the moon". However, here the expression إِذَا وَقَبَ (when it spreads) clearly points to the fact that it means "the night". The reason is that as its darkness increases, it increases by enshrouding many evils in it.

This verse is a very good example of the fact that evil does not have an

7. These two terms are used by the proponents of mysticism to refer to certain saints and personalities they revere.

8. and from the evil of the night as it spreads

independent existence in this world so that one may have to regard good and evil to have two separate creators and both of these creators be beseeched. The truth of the matter, as pointed out above, is that evil is a by-product of the objects created by God. Therefore, to protect oneself from it, one does need to seek refuge in someone other than God; on the contrary, refuge must be sought with Him and only He should be beseeched and implored.

At various places in the Qur'ān, it is mentioned that for the sustenance of this world, just as the warmth of the day is necessary, the calm and cold of night is also necessary. In these verses, the harmony between conflicting elements in sustaining this world is presented as an argument for monotheism. Here, by urging man to seek refuge from the evil of the night, the message which is intended to be put across to him is that the night which provides comfort to man has an evil by-product: in it thieves, assassins, enemies, harmful creatures come out to harm him. It would be very wrong to conclude from the intervention of these unwanted visitors at night which co-exist with the comfort provided by it that the creator of the night is someone else and of the un-welcome things which appears in it to be someone else. Then the fact that both these creators are invoked for help would be as wrong. The correct and rational attitude would be to regard the creator of both as the same. It is He who has blessed man with the comfort of night and it is only He who can grant a person refuge from things which are harmful to him. In other words, just as the blessings of the night are a favour from God, the evil which it enshrouds is because of God's permission. Thus man must seek only His refuge in all circumstances.

Here, one must keep in consideration the fact we have referred to earlier that by not understanding this nature of the existence of evil, some naïve people have regarded evil to have an independent existence and then founded the concept of dualism by regarding good and evil to have separate creators. By giving a very sound example, the Qur'ān has clarified in this verse what the actual nature of evil is and who is the one who can give man refuge from it.

وَمِنْ شَرِّ النَّفَّاثَاتِ فِي الْعُقَدِ (٤)⁹

After urging man to seek refuge from evil which is material and tangible calamities, in this verse he is urged to seek refuge from evil which is spiritual and moral in nature.

The expression النَّفَّاثَاتِ فِي الْعُقَدِ means "those who blow on knots". Although the word النَّفَّاثَاتِ is in the feminine form, it does necessarily

9. and from the evil of those who blow on knots

imply women. According to linguistic principles of Arabic,¹⁰ it can imply evil spirits and evil souls, whether men or women and whether here they refer to those among the Jews and Sabeans or among the conjurers and soothsayers of Arabia.

Blowing on knots is the way adopted by charmers and people who give amulets. They chant spells in their minds and then blow on chords and threads while tying knots on it and believe that in this manner they can lure and control their subject. They then try to inflict whatever harm they want to on this subject. The adjective النَّفَّاثَاتِ (*al-naffāthāt*) is intended to portray a picture of their pretense. A similar portrayal is made at another place in the Qur'ān of the meditation of the soothsayers: يُلْقُونَ السَّمْعَ وَأَكْثُرُهُمْ كَاذِبُونَ (They eagerly listen and most of them are liars, (26:223)). In my opinion, the purpose of this portrayal is to point out its worthlessness.

As far as the question whether charms and spells do have effects is concerned, we have already given our opinion while commenting on the issue of Hārūt and Mārūt mentioned in Sūrah Baqarah (2:102).¹¹ In our opinion, a greater part of these spells is mere fraud and deception as is evident from the above quoted verse (26:223). And if at all they can have effects, the Qur'ān has clearly said that they can only cause any harm by God's permission: بِضَآرِّينَ بِهِ مِنْ أَحَدٍ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَمَا هُمْ (And the fact of the matter is that they can harm none with what they learnt except by God's permission, (2:102)). Now when they can cause harm only with the permission of God, there remains no need to look for someone other than God for seeking refuge with.

It is the practice of God to deal with people the way they deal with themselves: If a person fosters a strong relationship with God and his heart remains replete with His remembrance and if he protects himself from superstitious beliefs and always turns to God when he encounters hardships, then the Almighty does not allow Satan to take the better of him. If some accidental harm does come his way, he is able to save himself by diverting his attention to God.

On the other hand, if a person is superstitious and credulous and instead of relying on sense and reason relies on speculation and conjecture and if instead of deeply trusting God clings to doubts and scepticism, then such a person is often lured by devils among the jinn and men, who then escort him to all sorts of evil. The only way to protect

10. In Arabic, the words *al-arwāḥ* and *al-nufūs* are feminine and can be regarded as the suppressed nouns of the feminine adjective *al-naffāthāt*. The expressions thus would be: *al-arwāḥ al-naffāthāt* and *al-nufūs al-naffāthāt*. (Translator)

11. Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥī, *Tadabbur-i Qur'ān*, vol. 1, 238-244.

oneself from this evil, according to this *sūrah*, is to remain in the asylum of the Almighty. Whenever he feels that his heart is getting inclined to evil, he should immediately seek refuge with Him. The best way to do this is to recite these two last *sūrahs* of the Qur'ān.

وَمِنْ شَرِّ حَاسِدٍ إِذَا حَسَدَ¹²(٥)

Here, at the end, the Qur'ān has taught the believers a prayer to shield themselves from the envies of envious people. The envious are referred to here in general and no one specific is implied. The reason is that whoever the envious person maybe, when his envy crosses the limits, like the envy of Cain it subsides only after spilling the blood of Able. Hence one should keep seeking refuge from it. We have already explained in the introduction to this *sūrah* that it is Satan who envies man the most and is particularly envious of the belief of monotheism. We have already referred to the evidence regarding his intense determination to alienate people from this belief. The following verses may also be kept in consideration so that the emphasis in the words إِذَا حَسَدَ (when he envies) is fully understood:

قَالَ أَرَأَيْتَكَ هَذَا الَّذِي كَرَّمْتَ عَلَيَّ لَئِنْ أَخَّرْتَنِ إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ لأَحْتَنِكَنَّ ذُرِّيَّتَهُ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا قَالَ اذْهَبْ فَمَنْ تَبِعَكَ مِنْهُمْ فَإِنَّ جَهَنَّمَ جَزَاءُكُمْ جَزَاءً مَوْفُورًا وَاسْتَفْزِرْ مِنْهُمْ اسْتَطَعْتَ مِنْهُمْ بِصُوتِكَ وَأَجْلِبْ عَلَيْهِمْ بِخَيْلِكَ وَرَجِلِكَ وَشَارِكْهُمْ فِي الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَوْلَادِ وَعِدْهُمْ وَمَا يَعِدُهُمُ الشَّيْطَانُ إِلَّا غُرُورًا إِنَّ عِبَادِي لَيْسَ لَكَ عَلَيْهِمْ سُلْطَانٌ وَكَفَى بِرَبِّكَ وَكِيلًا (١٧: ٦٢-٦٥)

Satan said: "So this is the one whom You have exalted above me. If You grant me respite till the Day of Judgement, I will wipe out all but a few of his descendants." The Almighty replied: "Go! Hell is your complete reward, and the complete reward of those that follow you. Incite with your voice whomever you are able to. Muster against them your battalions on horse and on foot. Be their partner in their riches and in their offspring. Make false promises with them and all of Satan's promises are mere deception. However, You will not be able to influence My true servants and sufficient is Your Lord for trust." (17:62-65)

Evident from this verse under discussion is the vigour, determination

12. and from the evil of the envious person when he envies

and resources with which Satan is equipped to divert mankind from the path of monotheism. This aggression on his part is pointed by the words: إِذَا حَسَدَ ie. when this envious being starts to show his envy with full frenzy.

This *sūrah* does not require any narrative to explain its occasion for revelation. However, some people have mentioned it with reference to an incident as per which the Prophet (sws), God forbid, once came under the influence of a magical spell of the Jews. As a result of this spell, he became sick and was taught the words of this *sūrah*. Later, he was cured of the ill-effects of this spell once he recited these *sūrahs*.

Although it is claimed that this magical spell did not in any way effect him in discharging his duties as a prophet, simultaneously it is also acknowledged with naivety that as a result of this spell the Prophet (sws) felt mentally and physically drained. At times, he would think that he had done a certain task whereas actually he had not. Similarly, it was acceded that he would think that he had gone near his wives whereas he would not have. At other times, he would even begin to have doubts about his sight: he would think that he had seen a thing, whereas he would not have in fact seen it. These people also claim that the Prophet (sws) did not remain in this state for a few hours or a few days – he was in it for six whole months. The question arises that if he, God forbid, really remained in this state of mental lapse for a period of six months, how can it be ruled out that he, God forbid, could have thought that he had offered a prayer whereas actually he had not or that he had dictated to his scribes the revelations brought to him by Gabriel or not or whether he had seen Gabriel or not? On what grounds can one rule out these possibilities? If someone says that we find no such information in Ḥadīth narratives, one can reply by saying that when have all details been recorded in them? On the other hand, what is more probable is that a person whose mental state was such, then such things would have emanated from him. It would be strange if they had not.

In the opinion of this writer, what is enough to reject this occasion of revelation is the fact it is against the established belief of infallibility about Prophets (*‘iṣmat-i anbiyā’*) mentioned by the Qur’ān. As per this belief, they cannot err in matters of receiving divine revelation the way it was sent to them and also cannot err in communicating it in its original form to their followers. The fact that prophets have been wounded or have lost some of their teeth or were even assassinated does in no way negate this belief. None of these happenings can hinder them in discharging their duties as prophets. No one can present these incidents as arguments to say that if a prophet can be inflicted with these things, then he can also come under the influence of a magical spell to the extent that he is unable to remember whether he had done something or not and

seen something or not. The Almighty has protected His prophets from such satanic effects and this protection is essential for the protection of the contents of the religion revealed to them. It is this protection which authenticates the words and deeds of prophets as part of religion. The whole of the Qur'ān bears witness to the fact that the Prophet (sws) received and communicated the religion revealed to him in a fool-proof manner and it is incumbent upon every Muslim to profess belief in this.

If we judge these Āḥadith on the principles of *rawāyah*, a major weakness in the chain of narrators can be noted. In order to inject fabrications in a narrative of the six canonical collections, concocted and weak narratives have been relied upon and the fabricated incident has been portrayed as an actual happening.¹³ Among the compilers of the six canonical collections, this narrative has only been recorded by Bukhārī, Muslim and Ibn Mājah. It is a *ḵabār-i wāḥid* up to the third step in its chain of narration.¹⁴ In one narrative of Bukhārī, Sufyān ibn 'Uyaynah admits that he has had heard it for the first time from Ibn Jurayj.¹⁵ In other words, this event came to general notice almost a hundred years after the Prophet's death. Before this, only a small number of people were aware of it. Everyone can understand that if the Prophet (sws) had really remained under the influence of a magical spell, then such an incident was so extra-ordinary that it should have become very famous in the first period and this narrative should have reached us as a *mutawātir* narrative.

None of the narratives reported in the canonical collections informs us about the length of the period for which the Prophet (sws) remained in this state. On the other hand, the words which are common to the narratives of all the three collections are: *حتى إذا كان ذات يوم أو ذات ليلة دعا رسول الله ثم دعا ثم دعا* (Till the time that when a day or a night had passed, the Prophet (sws) supplicated continuously).¹⁶ It is evident from these words that if something did influence his mind, it only lasted for some hours. Then he supplicated continuously to God and was cured of its effects. If this happened, then it was similar to how Moses (sws) had come to regard the ropes and staffs of the magicians as snakes and became worried temporarily. It is not unlikely that such things cannot

13. To comprehend this conclusion of the author would require a careful study of all the variants of the narrative. (*Translator*)

14. The first three narrators are 'Ā'ishah (rta), 'Urwah Ibn Zubayr and Hishām Ibn 'Urwah. (*Translator*)

15. Al-Bukhārī, *al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 5, 2175, (no. 5432).

16. Al-Bukhārī, *al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 4, 1913, (no. 3095); Ibid., vol. 5, 2172, (no. 5430); Ibid., vol. 5, 2347, (6028); Muslim, *al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 4, 1719, (no. 2189); Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, vol. 2, 1173, (no. 3545).

happen. Such incidents can even take place to test the prophets but are always transient so that they do not effect in any way the infallibility of the prophets.

One should also keep in mind the fact none of the *muḥaddithūn* of the canonical collections have mentioned this incident as the *shā'n-i nuzūl* (occasion of revelation) of these *sūrahs* nor has it been mentioned that the Prophet (sws) had untied the knots of a chord whilst reciting these *sūrahs*. In other words, it becomes evident that these *muḥaddithūn* never linked this incident to Sūrah Falaq. It is the later scholars who have linked the narratives which mention this incident to these last two *sūrahs* of the Qur'ān. Notwithstanding the fact that it is evident from this explanation of Sūrah Falaq and that of its succeeding *sūrah*, Sūrah Nās that the subject matter of these *sūrahs* rejects the fact that the revelation of these *sūrahs* be occasioned because of an unspecified magician casting a spell on the Prophet (sws).

With the grace of God, the explanation of this *sūrah* ends here. فالحمد
لله على إحسانه (so gratitude be to Him for this favour)

Lahore,
9th August, 1980 AD
26 Ramaḍān, 1400 AH

Sūrah Nās

Central Theme

This *sūrah* is the counterpart of Sūrah Falaq, the previous *sūrah* and there is no essential difference between the central themes of the two. Both are a means through which a person seeks the Almighty's protection from various evils. However, there are certain aspects which distinguish this *sūrah* from the previous one:

Firstly, in this *sūrah*, refuge is sought with Allah through His attributes which are directly related to man. As a result, the appeal of the *sūrah* is more effective. The previous *sūrah* also carries an effective appeal, yet it is more argumentative in style. In this *sūrah*, on the other hand, this style, though present, is overshadowed by repeated earnest calls which invoke Allah's mercy.

Secondly, in the previous *sūrah*, refuge is sought from various evils, while this *sūrah* seeks protection against Satan, the root of all evils and, as indicated in the previous *sūrah*, the eternal enemy of *tawhīd*.

Thirdly, in the previous *sūrah*, Satan is referred to with regard to one of his characteristics – jealousy. In this *sūrah*, his method and technique, his clan and accomplices, the sphere of his incursions and onslaughts, all are brought to light so that people have a clear perception of their shrewd enemy and are in a position to defend themselves.

Text and Translation

قُلْ أَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ النَّاسِ (١) مَلِكِ النَّاسِ (٢) إِلَهِ النَّاسِ (٣) مِنْ شَرِّ الْوَسْوَاسِ الْخَنَّاسِ (٤)
الَّذِي يُوسْوِسُ فِي صُدُورِ النَّاسِ (٥) مِنَ الْجِنَّةِ وَالنَّاسِ (٦)

Say: I seek refuge with the Lord of mankind, the Emperor of mankind, the God of mankind from the mischief of the prompter who withdraws after his prompts, who implants evil suggestions in the hearts of men, and is from among the jinn and men.

Explanation

قُلْ أَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ النَّاسِ (١) مَلِكِ النَّاسِ (٢) إِلَهِ النَّاسِ (٣)¹

These opening verses seek refuge with Allah through three attributes, which, in fact, also determine the basic rights of Allah imposed on man. They guide us moreover that help should only be solicited from someone who possesses such attributes.

How the attributes stated above ascertain these basic rights can be understood if one appreciates that it is only befitting for someone who is the Cherisher of mankind to be their real Emperor, and it is only befitting for someone who is the real Emperor of mankind to have the right to be worshipped. It is certainly against all norms of sense to worship and regard someone who is not the real cherisher of mankind their real emperor and, therefore, such practice has been totally forbidden.

In Sūrah Fātiḥah, it is stated that since it is the Almighty Who is the Cherisher of His creation, all thanksgivings must return to Him, and He alone should be worshipped and sought help from. What the opening three verses of this *sūrah* imply is no different.

An acceptance of the above three attributes closes all doors which lead to polytheism, and an acknowledgement of one of them necessitates the acknowledgement of the others.

مِنْ شَرِّ الْوَسْوَاسِ الْخَنَّاسِ (٤)²

This verse states the real entity from which refuge is sought in the above verses. Though it is not stated in words, yet it is quite evident from the attributes mentioned and the specification made later that it is Satan who is referred to.

The verse describes Satan's technique and his line of attack: he allures people through propaganda and deceptive promises and by initiating wicked suggestions in their minds. After entrapping them, he acquits himself of all the consequences and enjoys watching the ill-fated foolish who get caught by his sinister schemes.

There is no conjunction between *وَسْوَاسٍ* (prompter of evil) and *خَنَّاسٍ* (one who withdraws) which means that these two characteristics exist simultaneously in the noun they qualify.

It is quite evident from this verse that Satan's only weapon is prompting evil suggestions. Apart from this, he has no other powers through which he may necessarily lead a person astray. He tries to frighten as well as to cajole people through threatening admonitions and

1. Say: I seek refuge with the Lord of mankind, the Emperor of mankind, the God of mankind.

2. From the mischief of the prompter who withdraws after his prompts.

sugar-coated promises, but he cannot harm people who are not over-awed by him. Therefore, when he had threatened the Almighty that he would lead mankind astray, the Almighty had clearly replied:

إِنَّ عِبَادِي لَيْسَ لَكَ عَلَيْهِمْ سُلْطَانٌ (٦٥:١٧)

[Do whatever you can,] You will have no power over my people [who intend to remain on the right path]. (17:65)

He also assured His creation that He would certainly help those who would repose all their confidence in Him and counteract the assaults of Satan:

وَكَفَىٰ بِرَبِّكَ وَكِيلًا (٦٥:١٧)

Your Lord suffices as [your] Guardian. (17:65)

The adjective خَنَّاسٍ (*khannās*) delineates another aspect of Satan's character. Commentators have generally regarded it to mean someone who prompts evil suggestions while remaining hidden from people. This meaning can only be accepted if Satan and his allies are regarded as jinn, but the last verse clearly points out that these evil creatures exist both in men and in the jinn-folk. Some other commentators have understood it to mean "someone who comes again and again," which has no basis in the Arabic language.

In the opinion of this writer, it means "someone who withdraws and retreats." This actually brings out a typical feature of Satan's mode of attack. Initially, he comes out and entices his prey, and when a person succumbs to his wicked suggestions, he acquits himself of all the consequences. This very character of Satan is also depicted at various instances in the Qur'ān. In Sūrah Furqān, he is called خَذُول (khadhūl), that is "one who deceives his followers":

وَكَانَ الشَّيْطَانُ لِلْإِنْسَانِ خَذُولًا (٢٩:٢٥)

And Satan is the deceiver of men. (25:29)

To quote Sūrah Banī Isrā'īl:

وَمَا يَعِدُهُمُ الشَّيْطَانُ إِلَّا غُرُورًا (٦٤:١٧)

All of Satan's promises are mere deception. (17:64)

Sūrah Ḥaṣhr portrays this aspect of Satan's character even more

clearly:

كَمَثَلِ الشَّيْطَانِ إِذْ قَالَ لِلْإِنْسَانِ اكْفُرْ فَلَمَّا كَفَرَ قَالَ إِنِّي بَرِيءٌ مِّنكَ إِنِّي أَخَافُ
اللَّهَ رَبَّ الْعَالَمِينَ (١٦:٥٩)

They are like Satan, when he says to man: disbelieve. When he disbelieves, he says to him: I here and now disown you, I fear Allah, the Lord of the Worlds. (59:16)

The Jews had demonstrated this Satanic character at the time of the battle of Badr. They had induced the Quraysh to attack Madīnah by giving them the assurance that the Muslims would not be able to face them, and if need be, they themselves would come forward and assist them. However, as history bears witness, they never turned up in the battlefield. The Qur'ān has depicted this character as follows:

وَإِذْ زَيْنَ لَهُمُ الشَّيْطَانُ أَعْمَالَهُمْ وَقَالَ لَا غَالِبَ لَكُمُ الْيَوْمَ مِنَ النَّاسِ وَإِنِّي جَارٌ
لَّكُمْ فَلَمَّا تَرَأَتِ الْفِئَتَانِ نَكَصَ عَلَى عَقَبَيْهِ وَقَالَ إِنِّي بَرِيءٌ مِّنْكُمْ إِنِّي أَرَى مَا
لَا تَرَوْنَ (٤٨:٨)

And when Satan [Jews] made their [the Quraysh's] deeds seem fair to them and said: Today no man shall overcome you, and I shall be with you. But when the two forces faced each other, he took to his heels saying: I am done with you; I see what you do not. (8:48)

Not only Satan and his followers exhibit this very character in this world, they will also do so in the next. The Qur'ān, on a number of occasions, has drawn a picture of the dialogue that will take place in Hell between evil leaders and their followers. These adherents will ask the leaders, whom they had so diligently followed, to come forward and help them. The leaders will reply that it was their fault that they had followed them, for they had never forced them to do so; therefore, they should now face the punishment themselves.

The word خَنَّاسٍ (*khannās*) is meant to express the above mentioned feature of Satan's character and actually sounds a warning to everyone: People should not be overwhelmed by his sweet talk; rather they should always keep in mind his disloyalty and betrayals when a person falls prey to his 'word of honour'.

الَّذِي يُوسَّسُ فِي صُدُورِ النَّاسِ (٥) مِنَ الْجِنَّةِ وَالنَّاسِ (٦)³

The above stated verses indicate Satan's mission as well as his brethren's so that people can have a clear perception of their enemy. His modus operandi is to prompt evil suggestions in a person's bosom. Here, the word صُدُورٍ (chest) actually implies a person's heart which is contained in his chest. These evil suggestions are of course meant to divert a man from the right path. Satan himself has stated this to be his mission as specified by the Qur'ān at various places. He has no other authority or hold on man and cannot forcibly lead him astray, as mentioned earlier.

The words مِنَ الْجِنَّةِ وَالنَّاسِ ([and is] from among the jinn and men) specify Satan's brethren, indicating that he is not an independent creation of Allah, but every one among the jinn and men who induces evil suggestions in others' hearts is, in fact, a Satan. The Qur'ān has specified that the Satan who had inveigled Adam was from among the jinn. It is incorrect to regard this particular Satan as an independent or eternal creation. However, his mission will be carried on till the Day of Judgement through his disciples and followers who are from both men and the jinn folk.

With these words the exegesis of this *sūrah* ends, which ends *Tadabbur-i Qur'ān* as well. I, as a humble servant, am extremely grateful to the Almighty for being able to be of some service to the cause of truth. I pray to Him to make this work a means of my salvation in the Hereafter, to make every rightly interpreted verse a source of benefit for others, and to protect everyone from the evils of an erroneous inference. اللَّهُمَّ ارنا الحق حقاً وارزقنا اتباعه وارنا الباطل باطلاً وارزقنا اجتنابه وأخرد عوانا ان الحمد لله رب العلمين (O Allah! Show us the right path the way it is and make us follow it, and O Allah! Show us the wrong path the way it is and keep us away from it; Our final statement is that all gratitude is to God, the Lord of the worlds). (Amen)

3. Who implants evil suggestions in the hearts of man, and is from among the jinn and the men.